

APOSTLES AND AGITATORS

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Apostles and Agitators

Italy's Marxist
Revolutionary Tradition

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Preface

In 1978 the Red Brigades murdered Aldo Moro, who for twenty years had been Italy's leading political figure. The judicial investigation of this spectacular crime resulted in thousands of pages of testimony by defendants from a cross-section of Italian society. University intellectuals and high school dropouts, members of the working class and jobless drifters, middle-class professionals and layabouts of indefinable class status testified at the trials. All of the defendants spoke about their dreams of a Marxist revolution. To examine the record in the judicial archives is to discover just how many such dreamers there were in Italy. The documents also confirm that large numbers of Italians thrilled to the prospect of capitalism's violent overthrow. The ubiquity of the dream, its force and basically unchangeable character, suggest a rootedness in the culture for which Italy's long national experience with revolutionary Marxism offers the most persuasive account. The emergence and development of this tradition, its protagonists, and their legacy in contemporary Italy are the themes that I address in this book.

Only a people of the most vivid imagination, idealistic yearnings, and unconsolated injuries could have produced such a tradition and acted on it in the intense way that the Italians did. Other peoples in the 1960s rebelled against the war in Vietnam, racism, consumerism, and sexual repression, but the Italians suffered in these years and their terrible aftermath from record levels of politicized violence. Nothing like the Red Brigade's reign of terror—involving the intimidation,

maiming, and murder of politicians, policemen, journalists, university professors, and judges—occurred on the same scale anyplace else. History alone provides the means for understanding the unique state of affairs that existed then in Italy. The country had an extreme left-wing value system in place that gave form to the content of the younger generation's anger, frustration, and disappointment. The precise issues and problems that concerned them are important and need to be understood, but the form this vast eruption of violence took originated in the Marxist revolutionary tradition.

An ideology comes into being as a result of many historical factors. For an ideology that is native to a country, the appearance and reception of foundational texts and the political response they engender can best be understood in the context of the country's long-term socioeconomic conditions and cultural life. In such a case texts and contexts influence each other in varying degrees of reciprocity. The Marxist revolutionary tradition, however, was not native to Italy. The Italians imported it, mainly from Germany and Russia. Moreover, the influence of foreign thinkers and activists long continued to be of vital importance to Italian Marxists. The social context of an ideology matters decisively in the long run, and the Marxist revolutionary tradition in Italy is not an exception to the rule. Nevertheless, for this particular story the ideas came first, from abroad, and then the intellectual and activist figures examined in this book adapted them to the evolving Italian environment.

Although Marx himself found intellectuals to be a useless category for historical analysis—the mode of production having a determining effect on culture and thought—the history of his movement in Italy contradicts him. Antonio Gramsci, the country's foremost Marxist, understood the master's shortcomings as an historian of ideas. In the hegemony theory of the *Prison Notebooks*, Gramsci emphasized the pivotal role of intellectuals in the culture wars that help to decide the outcome of history. He thus connected Marxism to the well-established scholarly canons to be found in the classic works of Edmund Burke, Alexis de Tocqueville, Jacob Burckhardt, Max Weber, Karl Mannheim, and Benedetto Croce. I conceived my book with the theoretical guidelines of these thinkers uppermost in mind, principally that all politics ensues from a vision of the world and depends on intellectuals for its articulation and preservation through time.

The story begins with Marx, the central figure of the communist revolutionary tradition. The first chapter deals with the principal features of communist theory as it came together in Marx's writings. Here the aim is to survey the concepts and vocabulary from which Marx's followers in Italy derived their often discordant worldviews, not to present a complete overview of his life and thought.

From the beginning, Italian Marxism developed a split personality. On the one hand, reformists attempted to harmonize Marxism with existing democratic and liberal traditions. On the other, revolutionaries thought that Marxism would replace democracy and liberalism, as those terms had come to be understood in the nineteenth century, with a completely new proletarian society and political consciousness. This book deals with the revolutionaries. The focus will be on their arguments and actions against the capitalist status quo, the non-Marxist socialists, and the Marxist reformists. The defining figures of the Marxist revolutionary tradition in Italy were Carlo Cafiero, Antonio Labriola, Arturo Labriola, Benito Mussolini, Amadeo Bordiga, Antonio Gramsci, and Palmiro Togliatti. All of them stand out as historical actors of high importance in the crusade for a Marxist revolution in Italy. Only through a historical examination of their writings and careers can the complex unfolding of the Marxist revolutionary tradition in Italy be understood. Their hopes and dreams belong not only to the pages of distant history but to the record of contemporary times as well.

APOSTLES AND AGITATORS

Karl Marx: The Word

The discovery of gold and silver in America, the extirpation, enslavement, and entombment in mines of the aboriginal population, the beginning of the conquest and looting of the East Indies, the turning of Africa into a warren for the commercial hunting of black-skins, signalised the rosy dawn of the era of capitalist production.

—Karl Marx, *Capital*

For an intellectual who seethed with ambition and never lacked a robust sense of self-worth, Marx made surprisingly modest claims about the originality of his ideas. A remarkably consistent thinker throughout his career, Marx grandly sought to explain and to create a classless communist society that would be brought about by the initiative of the proletariat, actuating the natural trend of history and directing it toward its ultimate destination. Yet in a letter of 5 March 1852 to his friend Joseph Weydemeyer Marx denied that he had said anything new about the class struggle or its economic character, the very ideas most often associated with his name. These ideas, he insisted, had long been known to historians. “What I did that was new,” Marx told Weydemeyer, “was to prove: 1) that the existence of classes is only bound up with particular historical phases in the development of production, 2) that the class struggle necessarily leads to the dictatorship of the proletariat, 3) that this dictatorship itself only constitutes the transition to the abolition of all classes and to a classless society.” By Marx’s own count, two-thirds of his true intellectual legacy had to do with the dictatorship of the proletariat.¹

Marx’s self-estimate of his originality as a thinker oddly coincides, in significant measure, with the way his foremost antagonist on the left, Mikhail Bakunin, thought about him. Noting that because Marx was a German and a Jew he had to be an authoritarian from head to foot, Bakunin reduced the uniqueness of Marxism to the concept of the dictatorship of the proletariat. In *Statism and Anarchy* (1873) he at-

tacked this concept on anarchist grounds: “If there is to be a state there will be those who are ruled and those who are slaves.” Bakunin mocked Marx’s naive assurances that the dictatorship of the proletariat would consist of workers: “Yes, possibly of former workers who, as soon as they become the rulers or the representatives of the people, will cease to be workers and will look down at the plain working masses from the governing heights of the state; they will no longer represent the people, but only themselves and their claim to rulership over the people. Marx and his followers, in short, lacked an understanding of how political power actually worked. To the end of his life, through declining health, prestige, and influence, Bakunin sought to unmask the dictatorship of the proletariat as “the worst of all despotic governments.”²

Prophetic as Bakunin’s comments were, they did not address the real sources of strength and attractiveness in Marxism. In fact, the originality of Marx’s thinking went far beyond the point he made in the letter to Weydemeyer, to say nothing of Bakunin’s invective-laced characterization of him. A brilliant university student in philosophy, Marx drank deep of Hegelianism. In particular, Hegel’s dialectical theory of history fascinated him. By this theory Hegel meant that history is process, not the immediate reality that our senses and common sense apprehend. History, in other words, is moving by stages toward the Absolute, toward God, and we must not be deceived into thinking that our immediate field of vision constitutes reality in the full sense of the term. By putting the famously headstanding Hegel on his feet, Marx not only substituted the fullness of the proletariat’s development for man’s at-one-ness with God in Hegelian theory; he set in motion ideas that would redirect history. The question of how Marx developed his world-shaking ideas must be answered before we can proceed to an examination of their impact on the Marxist revolutionary tradition in Italy.

Early Writings

Marx was born on 5 May 1818 in Trier, Prussia. Although descended from rabbis on both sides of his family, he grew up in the Lutheran faith, a consequence of his lawyer father’s professionally inspired conversion in 1817 from Judaism to the Evangelical Established Church.³

The young boy was baptized in 1824 and attended a Lutheran elementary school. The instruction, however, did not find fertile ground in his mind. By the age of thirteen he had dismissed all religion on principle and had become a militant atheist. His hostile attitude toward religion would never change.

While still a university student, Marx joined the Berlin Doctors' Club, then the moving force behind the Young Hegelians. These leftist philosophy scholars sought to redirect Hegel's dialectic from religious to materialistic ends. Inspired by David Strauss's iconoclastic *Life of Jesus* (1835), the Young Hegelians viewed religion as the chief impediment to human progress. The influence of their atheism on Marx's thinking can be seen in the way he contemptuously rejected his Jewish heritage. In his notorious "On the Jewish Question" (1843), Marx dismissed Judaism as "a general contemporary anti-social element" and as a glorified name for selfishness, haggling, and money. That same year he wrote to his friend Arnold Ruge, "I find the Israelite faith repugnant." All his life Marx would pepper his correspondence with anti-Semitic slurs. Christianity fared even worse at his hands. His earliest writings bristle with a Young Hegelian hostility toward religion in all of its forms, but in particular he thought that a special polemic had to be undertaken against the dominant Christian state.⁴

Marx began to transcend the fetish that the Young Hegelians made of atheism only when he encountered French socialist thought, the second great foundation, along with Hegelianism, of his own distinctive philosophy. The job market soon would take him to Paris. Although as a university student Marx had found meaning in philosophy, he could not obtain a living from it because of his radical ideas and associations. His family was comfortably middle class, but he had to find a job, particularly after marrying the aristocratic Jenny von Westphalen in 1843. Marx worked as a journalist, first in Cologne and then, after his *Rheinische Zeitung* fell victim to government censorship, in Paris, all the while continuing the serious philosophical and historical studies that would lead him to embrace communism in 1844.

Many influences shaped Marx's early communist ideas, but according to one of his leading biographers, David McLellan, "Marx's sudden espousal of the proletarian cause can be directly attributed . . . to his first-hand contacts with socialist intellectuals in France." Marx arrived in Paris late in 1843 and immersed himself in the city's storied

left-wing culture. Here, in an atmosphere thoroughly conditioned by the ideas of Victor Considerant, the Comte de Saint-Simon, Charles Fourier, Prosper Enfantin, and Etienne Cabet, Marx's Left Hegelianism acquired a definite communist character. The conception of his own thought came about through the marriage of Hegelian philosophy and French socialism. Apart both were sterile; together they would engender a new civilization.⁵

The first fruit of Marx's theoretical breakthrough was "Towards a Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right," which he published in February 1844. The general line of argument, that "the criticism of religion is the presupposition of all criticism," followed from the Young Hegelian logic of his earlier work. Yet Marx quickly established that religion existed as an effect, not a cause: "The criticism of religion is therefore the germ of the criticism of the valley of tears whose halo is religion." Descending into this valley of tears with his French socialist guides, Marx found the proletariat, which "has a universal character because of its universal sufferings." With industrialization, the proletariat had become the protagonist of history and thus charged with the responsibility of redeeming all mankind from the enslavement of capitalism.⁶

Marx wrote the now famous "Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts" about six months later. Not fully published until 1932, these four manuscripts contained Marx's extended notes and commentaries on classical economics, as well as on socialist theory and Hegelianism. They developed further the arguments put forward in "Towards a Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right" and would serve as a source book for many of his subsequent writings. Into these Paris manuscripts he poured a measure of anticapitalist vitriol that identifies him as a product of the Romantic reaction against the modern world. He did not oppose modernity on principle as the Romantic conservatives and reactionaries did. Not for him the Wordsworthian position of wishing for a return to a traditional society of "constant toil and constant prayer" on "pastoral farms / Green to the very door."⁷ Nevertheless, the capitalist form of modernity aroused in him the kind of moral indignation that was characteristic of Romantics generally.

Although Marx would go on to develop a highly distinctive and far-reaching solution to the problem of capitalist modernity, "The Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts" take their place alongside *Lyrical Ballads* in the Romantic literature of protest against the emerging

industrial order. Under capitalism, Marx began, “the worker is degraded to the most miserable sort of commodity.” From the industrial capitalist money system comes modern society, which Marx decried for its gross inequalities: works of wonder, palaces, beauty, and culture for the rich; nakedness, hovels, imbecility, and cretinism for the workers.⁸

Marx analyzed the many aspects of alienation, beginning with its point of origin in the mode of production itself. The money system has only one purpose: to exploit the laborer for the enrichment of the capitalist. All the other facts, conditions, and themes of modern life flow directly or indirectly from this one fundamental truth about capitalism. The external or unnatural relationship that the laborer has with his work leads to the broader forms of alienation that Marx saw pervading modern society. Under capitalism, the worker “does not confirm himself in his work, he denies himself, feels miserable instead of happy, deploys no free physical and intellectual energy, but mortifies his body and ruins his mind.” The whole society eventually falls victim to the distortions imposed by capitalism. Alienation from work leads to an exaggerated emphasis on “eating, drinking and procreating,” which in turn become perverted by the absence of the context that genuine work alone can provide a man. In short, “alienated labour alienates (1) nature from man, and (2) man from himself.” Thus, man’s true nature is violated under capitalism, and for Marx the emancipation of society could only take place with the emancipation of the workers through the final elimination of the money system.⁹

The communist cure for alienation lay at hand. Communism he described as “the positive expression of overcoming private property,” the capitalist form of which in industrial society was the original source of modern alienation. To the lower forms of communism, all of which had failed, Marx added his new and improved version: “This is communism as the complete and conscious return of man conserving all the riches of previous development for man himself as a social, i.e., human being.” Communism would solve the age-old problems lately exacerbated by capitalism: the antagonism between man and nature, man and man, existence and essence, freedom and necessity, individual and species. The whole movement of history was bringing the world to communism: “It is the solution to the riddle of history and knows itself to be this solution.”¹⁰

At this time, Marx reconnected with the man who would become

his lifelong collaborator, Friedrich Engels (1820–1895). They had met the previous year in Cologne, but in Paris they became friends. Engels also came to his mature ideological convictions through an initial attraction to the writings of the Young Hegelians. Like Marx, he practiced journalism. More than Marx, Engels developed a straightforward journalistic style, which served him well in writing *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (1845). As a work of empirical observation, the book deeply influenced Marx. Engels actually knew something about factory life and the business world. He brought Marx the theorist into contact with the realities that the theories of the “Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts” purported to describe. Hence, his *Condition of the Working Class* is an immensely significant book in Marx’s intellectual itinerary.

Working for his family’s business in Manchester from 1842 to 1844, Engels had had an ideal opportunity to observe England’s epochal Industrial Revolution. Returning to his native Prussia in 1844, he wrote his classic book of journalistic reporting and sociological analysis from an incipiently Marxist perspective. In the main, though, Engels based his socialist ideas in this book less on theory than on moral outrage, a quality the work shares with such archetypal Romantic social critiques as Charles Dickens’s *Hard Times* and Thomas Carlyle’s *Past and Present*, which Engels admired. In the preface to the 1892 edition, he apologized for the lack of theoretical sophistication in the book: “Modern international Socialism, since fully developed as a science, chiefly and almost exclusively through the efforts of Marx, did not as yet exist in 1844. My book represents one of the phases of its embryonic development.”¹¹

In the English working class, Engels claimed to find “the highest and most unconcealed pinnacle of social misery existing in our day.” Industrial capitalism seemed to him nothing more than a system designed to enrich the investing class at the expense of the great mass of humanity. He portrayed slum life in London as a “whirlpool of moral ruin.” Here, Engels lamented, society has become a collection of ego-driven atoms with no sense of community at all, apart from the money relationships between men. He could see nothing in capitalism but reciprocal plundering.¹²

Engels’s city-by-city analysis of the ravages of English capitalism calls to mind Dante’s circle-by-circle tour of Hell in the *Inferno*. For Engels the final depth of “this hell on earth” is Manchester, “a planless knot-

ted chaos of houses, more or less on the verge of uninhabitableness.” In such an environment of ruthless exploitation, human nature inevitably suffers from physical and moral degradation. Man becomes other than what he was meant to be. Aesthetic blight and the despoiling of Nature turn him into a modern savage with no regard for anything but the satiation of his own monstrously deformed ego. The family cannot survive such unnatural pressures. Nothing decent, good, and natural can. Compared with the slum-dwellers of Manchester, the black slaves in the American South had a good life, Engels thought. At least the slavemasters had an economic incentive to take care of their investment in human chattel. Industrial capitalists, in contrast, could go about their business unhindered by any concern but to buy in the cheapest market and sell in the most dear. Engels denounced capitalism as the moral equivalent of murder. He predicted that “a revolution will follow with which none hitherto known can be compared . . . ; the vengeance of the people will come down with a wrath of which the rage of 1793 gives no true idea. The war of the poor against the rich will be the bloodiest ever waged.”¹³

The first important work that Marx and Engels wrote together was *The German Ideology* (1846), described by Leszek Kolakowski in his magisterial *Main Currents of Marxism* as an early summa of Marxist thought. Engels freely admitted that Marx, who fled to Brussels after being expelled from France in February 1845 for his radical views, did most of the deep thinking for this book. In Brussels for three years, Marx conceived and largely wrote *The German Ideology* there. Failing to attract a publisher, the book would remain unknown for nearly a century. It stands out, however, as one of Marx’s most important books because in these pages he presented for the first time a complete statement of the materialist theory of history and achieved what his biographer, McLellan, calls “self-clarification.”¹⁴

Yet *The German Ideology* is as much a satire on “the new revolutionary philosophers in Germany” as an exposition of Marx’s ideas about history, intellectuals, and economics. Having come out of the left-wing Hegelian movement himself, Marx appears here to be putting away the things of a child. He does not do so respectfully. He sees them all, from David Friedrich Strauss to Max Stirner (savagely mocked here as “Sancho” and “Saint Max”), as armchair radicals, striking a ludicrous pose as revolutionaries, but lacking even the most minimal understanding of what true revolution entails. From these rhetorically fiery

though intellectually benighted individuals little of real consequence could be expected. Marx's dismissal of Stirner's *The Ego and His Own*, as the consummate example of the bloated, frothy, and pretentious style of German speculative philosophy, must be one of the longest book reviews in the history of literature.¹⁵

To make history, politics, and economics truly scientific and truly human, that is, to harness them to the genuine needs of mankind, it would be necessary to begin with the material conditions of life. Marx called for empirical research "without the mystification or speculation" of the Young Hegelians, about whom he could only write with a backward-looking and pitying sneer. In the book's most famous sentence, "It is not consciousness that determines life, but life that determines consciousness," Marx presents the essence of his entire system. The German philosophy, conditioned by the metaphysics of Hegel, descends from heaven to earth, but Marx wants to eliminate the former because the only heaven we can know is here on earth.¹⁶

The material conditions of life give rise to the class conflict that for Marx drives the historical process toward the triumph of capitalism. Capitalism was producing "a power which has become more and more enormous and, in the last instance, turns out to be the *world market*." With startling accuracy, Marx foresaw the homogenizing power of global capitalism. Before the relentless advance of the money power, he predicted, individual nations and cultures would yield. Dominating this development would be "a class which in all nations has the same interest and for which nationality is already dead." In England and in parts of other industrialized countries, the homogenizing process was already far along, and a one-world destiny he thought inevitable for all humanity under capitalism.¹⁷

Marx further predicted that by benefiting the exploiting few to an obscene degree, world capitalism would in time provoke a revolution by the class "which has to bear all the burdens of society without enjoying its advantages." He insisted that revolution alone could bring about the desired result of a communist society, the kind of community in which "each individual [has] the means of cultivating his gifts in all directions." In addition to its practical political efficacy, Marx attributed to revolution a therapeutic value. Only by violently overthrowing the exploiting bourgeoisie could the proletariat "succeed in ridding itself of all the muck of the ages and become fitted to found society anew." Through this "self-activity," members of the proletariat

become “individuals,” prepared at last to accomplish the destiny of mankind. From the beginning, Marxism presented itself as a master plan for the transformation of the world into a garden of earthly delights.¹⁸

As a movement, Marxism developed along both the theoretical line laid out by Marx in *The German Ideology* and the practical line of Engels in *The Condition of the Working Class in England*. Marx aspired to a perfect union between theory and practice. In “Theses on Feuerbach” (1845), he wrote: “The philosophers have only *interpreted* the world in various ways; the point, however, is to change it.”¹⁹ The perfect union that Marx had in mind, therefore, was not one of parity. Theory clearly was to be the handmaiden of practice. The mixing of science with a specific political agenda would draw the withering criticism of numerous ideological opponents in the liberal, the conservative, and even the socialist camps. Nevertheless, Marx always enjoyed the support of devoted admirers, such as Engels, who sustained him in his long and arduous struggle to apply the laws of history to the cause of the proletariat.

Marx’s conviction that a proletarian revolution was the only cure for the disease of capitalism became the starting point for his own political activity. While living in Brussels, he established the Communist Correspondence Committee as a coordinating organization for communist groups throughout Europe. He soon revealed his domineering nature and clashed with many of the correspondents. In all of these disputes, Marx sought to advance the notion that socialism had to be based on science, that is, on the materialist conception of history, not on sentiment. For Marx, Pierre Joseph Proudhon (1809–1865), the most famous French socialist thinker of the day, embodied the left’s problem with sentimentality. In *The Poverty of Philosophy* (1847) Marx assailed Proudhon’s ignorance of economics and the effect of material relations on all other relations. Such polemics earned Marx a reputation for pamphleteering, but he made a poor colleague for people whose ideas differed from his own. He was a man in search of disciples.

The Communist Manifesto

Marx did find an enthusiastic following among a group of German Communist exiles in London. In 1836 these men formed the League of the Just in Paris. Three years later most of the League’s members

emigrated to London. There they organized the German Workers Educational Union. By 1847 this union had nearly one thousand members. In June of that year they founded yet another organization, the Communist League, with which Marx entered into correspondence. At the end of November they held a congress that Marx and Engels attended. The 28-year-old Marx made a strongly favorable impression on the London communists. They asked him and Engels to write their manifesto, which was conceived at the congress as a combined statement of communist principle and action program. Returning to Brussels, Marx did most of the conceptual work and all of the writing for *The Communist Manifesto*, which would become his best-known book.

Appearing at about the time that the Revolutions of 1848 erupted all across Europe, *The Communist Manifesto* got lost in the events of the moment. When in the counterrevolutionary aftermath of 1848 the Communist League disbanded, the document appeared to be—in Engels’s words—“doomed to oblivion.” As a succinct synthesis of Marx’s thought, however, the *Manifesto* would never be surpassed. In his 1888 preface, Engels pointed out Marx’s three major themes: (1) the mode of economic production has a determining effect on all aspects of society and culture; (2) all human history is about class struggle; and (3) it is the historical mission of the proletariat to redeem “society at large from all exploitation, oppression, class distinction, and class struggles.” Ranging among these themes, Marx set out to describe the “specter that is haunting Europe—the specter of Communism.”²⁰

As for the irresistible power of economic forces, Marx expanded on his earlier analysis of a world market. The consequences of this inchoate but tremendous development could be seen in every field of human activity, but he emphasized the social and cultural consequences most of all. Industrial capitalism and the resulting intensification of market forces had sparked the greatest transformation the world had ever known: “Constant revolutionizing of production, uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions, everlasting uncertainty and agitation distinguish the bourgeois epoch from all earlier ones.” Traditional values could not resist such a storm. Modern industry “has drowned the most heavenly ecstasies of religious fervor, of chivalrous enthusiasm, of philistine sentimentalism, in the icy water of ego-

tistical calculation.”²¹ Exploitation that in former times had been camouflaged by the niceties of religious scruple and noblesse oblige had come fully into the open with the modern bourgeois whose only concern was the pursuit of profit under a law of his own designing and enforcement. Being without money in the modern world was like being without grace in the medieval world. Every age had its own form of spiritual stench. For modern industrial man it was poverty, and he possessed an unlimited faith in the curative power of ambrosial cash.

In the rest of the world, industrial capitalism had the effect of artillery fire and bursting bombs on native cultures. With the Western bourgeoisie ubiquitously chasing for ever greater profits, non-Western peoples had lost the power to go on shaping their societies. They now had to adjust to an order of immeasurably superior power. The industrial capitalist system required organization and, above all, concentration. To achieve these requirements the “universal inter-dependence of nations” had to be established. This meant that all creation would become a factory without walls. Every nation would be assimilated into the capitalist system as the Western bourgeoisie went about creating “a world after its own image.” Marx’s comments about what we today call globalization permit us to recognize him as an outstanding prophet. He was not always right, but no other writer of the time matched his understanding of capitalism as a revolutionary force.²²

The dynamics of the class struggle inevitably pushed the capitalist system toward crisis, according to Marx. Bourgeois society had accomplished wonders in producing wealth, but it “is like the sorcerer who is no longer able to control the powers of the nether world whom he has called up by his spells.”²³ Enter the proletariat, which would grow along with capitalism and then usher in the communist order. With all humanity in thrall to the viciously exploitative capitalist order, the proletariat would be the world’s last chance for salvation.

At this point in his analysis, Marx engaged in some sleight of hand that would have a long-term effect on the internal debates of his followers. The proletariat, the putative savior of all men, itself required the saving intervention of “bourgeois ideologists,” like Marx, “who have raised themselves to the level of comprehending theoretically the historical movement as a whole.” Why “in times when the class struggle nears the decisive hour . . . a small section of the ruling class cuts itself

adrift, and joins the revolutionary class, the class that holds the future in its hands” is not disclosed to the reader.²⁴

Marx here raised the chicken-and-egg question about communism and the proletariat. Apparently, the proletariat is incapable of arriving at communism on its own; it needs the theoretical guidance of the bourgeois intellectuals. But from what source do they derive their insight? Marx says that they have raised themselves to the theoretical level required for their historic mission as the illuminati of the proletariat. Such a thesis raises a host of questions about what he really means in such books as *The German Ideology* about the economic substructure–intellectual superstructure model. According to that model, ideas come into existence as a result of class needs, which are always the consequences of economic forces. Marx does not use this model, however, to explain the emergence of the most important idea in history, communism, which in *The Communist Manifesto* is described as a gift from one class to another. The bourgeois ideologists are seen to transcend their class, but by what power they accomplish such a singular feat Marx does not say. It would be left to Antonio Gramsci, among Marxist theorists, to try to bring some order out of the confusion that Marx left behind on this point.

In its historical mission to replace capitalism with communism, the proletariat would have the help of the Communist party, which Marx portrays as the heir of the bourgeois ideologists. “The proletariat alone is a really revolutionary class,” but it needs advice and guidance. In the *Manifesto*, Marx spells out the kind of service that he expects the party to render. He begins with an assertion that used to make Bakunin shake with mirth: communists “have no interests separate and apart from those of the proletariat as a whole.” The possibility that power might tend toward corruption even in a proletarian government never for a moment intruded upon Marx’s thoughts about communist politics.²⁵

All would go according to plan under the guidance of the Communist party, which had the theoretical insight “of clearly understanding the line of march, the condition, and the ultimate general results of the proletarian movement,” provided the fools could be gotten out of the way first. Here was his plan: “Formation of the proletariat into a class, overthrow of bourgeois supremacy, conquest of political power by the proletariat.” With the revolution, men at last would be free: “Of

course, in the beginning, this cannot be effected except by means of despotic inroads on the rights of property.”²⁶ Then, once communism had been fully established, “the public power will lose its political character,” and the state will wither away.

Marx devoted much attention in the *Manifesto* to the fools who did not understand the plan or see its beauty. Down the list of objections to communism he went. Those who worried about the abolition of private property received this blast: “But in your existing society, private property is already done away with for nine-tenths of the population.” He essentially had the same message for critics who were horrified by communist assaults on the family: capitalism, which had resulted in an epidemic of prostitution and adultery, had already killed the family, and communists merely wanted “in substitution for a hypocritically concealed community of women, an open community of women.” Others wondered about who would work in a society not based on the profit motive, but Marx replied that under socialism men would not be selfish; anyway, under capitalism most men received nothing but a daily reprieve from homelessness and starvation. People had to be trained in the right social values in order to be fully human, and for this kind of ethical training capitalism had no vocation at all. Just the opposite was true. Under capitalism, culture meant “a mere training to act as a machine.” Communism, unconcerned about profit, would develop the whole man.²⁷

All other socialist alternatives to capitalism lacked credibility, Marx thought. The feudal socialism of alienated aristocratic elites, while sometimes interesting for its critical insights, had no future in the modern world. The proletariat rightly greeted these fantasies of nostalgia “with loud and irreverent laughter.” Marx also relegated what he called “petty bourgeois socialism” to the dustbin of history. Pitiful little schemes to arrest the growth of capitalism at one stage or another and thus regain some wholly imaginary golden age incited him to outbursts of malicious derision. The philosophical socialism of the German literati had an even more intensely negative effect on him. “The robe of speculative cobwebs, embroidered with the flowers of rhetoric, steeped in the dew of sickly sentiment” is how he described their escapist philosophy. Marx conceded that the writings of the French utopian socialists contained “the most valuable materials for the enlightenment of the working class.” Nevertheless, their day was over. It had

ended with an embarrassing rash of utopian communities, colonies, and sects—"pocket editions of the New Jerusalem." The future belonged to the communists.²⁸

In summing up the communists' agenda, Marx said that in the short run they wanted to protect the immediate interests of the workers and in the long run to bring about their triumph over the bourgeoisie. He recommended that communists adopt a flexible strategy in forming alliances with other opposition parties. Whatever furthered the cause of revolution should receive their support. Their ends could be attained only "by the forcible overthrow of all existing social conditions." Revolution above all, he cried. The proletariat could not raise itself up "without the whole superincumbent strata of official society being sprung into the air." Therefore: "Let the ruling classes tremble at a Communist revolution. The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win. Workingmen of all countries, unite!"²⁹

Economic Writings

After the authorities ordered Marx out of Brussels for his subversive activity, he made for Paris in time to observe the revolution there. Hoping to produce a similar revolutionary situation in Germany, Marx established a radical newspaper in Cologne, the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung*. At the same time he became deeply involved in the left-wing politics of Germany. In his editorials from these years appear many observations that eventually would become integral parts of the Marxist system. Of particular importance, he confirmed and further explained his attachment to the idea of the dictatorship of the proletariat. "Every provisional political set-up following a revolution," he wrote, "calls for a dictatorship, and an energetic dictatorship at that."³⁰ He glowed with pride over this idea and thought of it as the centerpiece of a distinctively Marxist politics. The prospect of revolution, however, quickly faded in Germany, and the last issue of the newspaper appeared on 18 May 1849. Completely destitute after investing much of his inheritance in this failed enterprise, Marx returned to Paris. Even there the forces of reaction under Louis Napoleon had triumphed, and Marx had to leave the city in July. The next month he took refuge in London, where he would live for the rest of his life.

Marx remained optimistic that a new wave of agitation would soon engulf Europe. He helped to start a new journal, the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung-Politisch-Oekonomisch Revue*, and contributed a series of articles to it entitled “1848 to 1849,” later republished by Engels as *The Class Struggles in France*. Applying his materialistic theories to the study of contemporary politics, Marx reasoned that the contradictions of capitalism could not be contained peacefully. In 1850 he addressed the Communist League and declared that “the revolution . . . is near at hand.” Not reactionaries but democratic reformers presented the greatest obstacle to the cause of revolution: “Far from desiring to transform the whole of society for the revolutionary proletarians, the democratic petty bourgeois strives for a change in social conditions by means of which the existing society will be made as tolerable and comfortable as possible for them.”³¹ Statements like this one, which abound in Marx’s writings from every stage of his career, would later be cited by his most extreme followers as clinching evidence against those Marxists who tried to argue that the master had been something other than what he always said he was: an ardent and relentless revolutionary.

Instead of the revolutionary upheaval predicted by Marx, however, Europe entered a long period of peace and stability. Only after Louis Napoleon’s December 1851 coup d’état, which in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* Marx analyzed with his customary vigor, wit, and self-assurance, did he acknowledge that revolution would have to await a new crisis. He would spend the rest of his life on the lookout for signs of a revolutionary cataclysm, but the dialectical consummation for which he devoutly wished always receded before him. In his confident expectation of a revolution near or far, Marx typified the large London community of radical German exiles. Their world consisted of ceaseless ideological infighting—at which Marx excelled—and fantastic hopes for the future. The revolution, variously defined, would come, and all would be well. Like every true genius, Marx lived his beliefs to the utmost, disdaining the compromises that success in the practical world required.

Marx never did well as a provider, even though friends, particularly Engels, generously supplemented his income as a journalist. He hit a low point in 1852, when the family knew real hunger and lived from day to day uncertain about keeping a roof over their heads. The *Revue*

had just about wiped him out financially, and to keep his family going he had to beg from friends and to hide from creditors. His wife, Jenny, suffered from a depression caused by the general squalor of their lives and aggravated by personal tragedy. Two of their children died, and a family servant—Helene Demuth—sent by Jenny’s mother bore Marx an illegitimate son in 1851. All contemporaries who have left accounts of Marx’s home life agreed that he lived amidst appalling disorder and filth. Stacks of papers and books cluttered his cramped living quarters in which not a completely solid or clean chair was to be found.³²

Marx’s financial fortunes began to improve in 1853, when he undertook to write articles on a regular basis for the *New York Daily Tribune*, then the largest-circulation newspaper in the world. Charles Dana, the editor of the *Tribune* and an alumnus of the Fourierist Brook Farm utopian community, had met Marx in Europe and admired him. From 1853 to 1862 Dana published 487 articles under Marx’s byline.³³ Marx did not actually write all of them himself. Some Engels wrote; others he translated from Marx’s original German; still others they wrote in collaboration. These articles brought in badly needed income and, at the same time, served as a staging area for what Marx considered his serious work on the capitalist system. He had begun to do research in the British Museum, and some of his initial findings made their way into his articles for the *Tribune*. Indeed, Marx later incorporated some of these articles directly into his major economic treatises of the late 1850s and the 1860s.

From October 1857 to March 1858 Marx wrote *The Grundrisse*, the outlines of a general work on economics. These notes to himself would not be published until 1939, but they are important for an understanding of Marx’s ultimate aims as a theorist of capitalism. McLellan calls *The Grundrisse* “the most fundamental of all Marx’s writings” because it contained notes on a broad range of vital topics only partly treated elsewhere.³⁴ Marx intended to publish a six-part treatise on economics in which he would examine capital, landed property, wage labor, the state, foreign trade, and the world market. The two books that he actually finished in pursuit of this design—*A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (1859) and *Capital* (1867)—dealt primarily with the first theme. Books two and three of *Capital*, which Engels edited and published after Marx’s death, were similarly limited in scope. Thus, *The Grundrisse* contains the sole indications that we

have of Marx's general economic theory, though they appear only in a faint and scattered form.

Of particular importance is the introduction that Marx wrote to his projected treatise. Here he set forth the basic principles of his economic theory. He intended to analyze "the *general condition* of all production." Everything existed in a material relation, directly or indirectly, to the whole. Inevitably, he denounced Hegelian thinking, "which regards the comprehending mind as the real man, and only the comprehended world as such as the real world." Marx contended that "the subject, society, must always be envisaged as the premise of conception even when the theoretical method is employed." A pronounced continuity thus characterized his theoretical approach to economics from the Paris Manuscripts and *The German Ideology* of the mid-1840s down to *The Grundrisse*.³⁵

The central idea of *The Grundrisse* is that under capitalism men can only be free insofar as they serve the system. Capitalism's vaunted individual freedom had no more meaning than that. This freedom became in practice "the complete subjugation of all individuality to social conditions."³⁶ Under capitalism, the economic substructure assumes a power greater than anything before seen in history. The formal control exerted by the kings and popes of past ages never approached in degree or kind the absolute mastery enjoyed by contemporary tycoons whose power emanated not only from their ownership of the means of production but from the solemnly agreed upon fiction that men had never been more "free" than in the enlightened and progressive present. Marx thought that he knew better. The "free competition" of capitalism had evolved as a carefully constructed system of global exploitation and would continue to do so. Behind freedom's facade, the machinery of capitalism ceaselessly pulled all humanity into the appalling slavery of the world market. The infinite variety of mankind would be reduced to its cash value in capitalism's "*bellum omnium contra omnes*" (the war of all against all).³⁷

Even science and technology had fallen prey to the corrupting force of capitalism. The progress of the machine age had to be seen for what it actually was, an aspect of capitalism's penetration and subversion of society. Workers had to adapt to the machines, not vice-versa—a process Marx described as "the appropriation of living labor by objectified labor." The technological marvels of the age had for their primary and

ultimate purpose the enhancement of surplus value, or profits, with the betterment-of-mankind rhetoric added as a kind of public relations ploy designed by the opinion makers of liberal society. Indeed, “all the sciences have been forced into the service of capital.” In advanced capitalist societies, “invention becomes a business, and the application of science to immediate production itself becomes a factor determining and soliciting science.” Far from wanting to assist the workers and make their lives better, capitalists planned to eliminate them through technology. The clear trend of capitalism was to turn proletarians into lumpenproletarians, with all power left in the hands of an international elite of billionaires and with the rest of the population “free” to find a place for itself as best it could. Marx’s entire economic theory rested on his unshakeable conviction that “social wealth in huger portions confronts labor as an alien and dominating force.”³⁸

Communism alone possessed the capacity to save mankind from the demons that capitalism had let loose in the world. As Marx had contended all along, human alienation arose from the money system and would end only when society adopted a communal mode of production. In *The Grundrisse*, Marx amplified his claims for communism, under which “the labor of the individual is from the outset taken as social labor.” He argued that the superiority of communism as a social and economic system stemmed from its capacity to save time for the laborers, who under capitalism worked not for themselves but for the enrichment of the bosses and the investors. With its priorities oriented exclusively toward the common good, communist society would stop the criminal waste of labor time on which the capitalist class system depended. “Ultimately, all economy is a matter of economy of time,” Marx contended. In the future communist world of his imagining, society would allocate its time appropriately “to achieve a production corresponding to its total needs.” In a communist society, the workers themselves would appropriate their surplus labor. In the new order, there would be “time for the full development of the individual.”³⁹

Capitalism would fail because of its contradictions. Indeed, “by striving to reduce labor time to a minimum, while, on the other hand, positing labor time as the sole measure and source of wealth, capital itself is a contradiction-in-process.” As capitalism evolved into “a system of universal exploitation,” the quest for profit would inevitably produce the conditions of ubiquitous squalor and degradation from which a

new world would come. To maximize profits, capitalism ever would be bent on “reducing labor time for the whole of society to a declining minimum.”⁴⁰ Marx thought that at some point in this dehumanizing process a revolution would be sure to erupt: “the universality for which capital ceaselessly strives comes up against barriers in capital’s own nature, barriers which at a certain stage of its development will allow it to be recognized as being itself the greatest barrier in the way of this tendency [universality] and will therefore drive toward its transcendence through itself.” Against the bourgeois economists “who consider capital to be an eternal and *natural* (not historical) form of production,” Marx argued that it was only the historical premise for a higher form of society, just as feudalism had been for capitalism.⁴¹

For the rest of his life, Marx devoted as much time and energy as he could to a systematization of the fragmentary ideas and lines of thought in *The Grundrisse*. Failing health and one financial crisis after another forced him to delay publication of his research on economics. Psychosomatic ailments brought on by the pressure of deadlines in combination with serious liver and teeth problems kept him bedridden for days at a time. Moreover, no matter how much money he earned from journalism or received from Engels, Marx always fell short of solvency. His biographer Francis Wheen asserts that Marx was always “catastrophically broke.”⁴² Windfalls actually exacerbated the problem because they encouraged habits of spending that outlasted the unanticipated income. Intent on maintaining the appearance of gentility for his aristocratic wife and young daughters, Marx habitually overspent on seaside vacations, piano lessons, private schools, tutors, dancing classes, and ball gowns while allowing grocery bills and the rent to go unpaid.

Not until 1859 did he present a manuscript to his publisher in Germany. This became the first part of *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, which appeared in June of that year. Still determined to write the six books outlined in *The Grundrisse*, Marx explained in the preface: “The entire material lies before me in the form of monographs, which were written not for publication but for self-clarification at widely separated periods; their remoulding into an integrated whole according to the plan I have indicated will depend on circumstances.” The book dealt only in a limited and tentative way with the first theme in *The Grundrisse*, capital, and passed virtually unnoticed by the intel-

lectual world. Nevertheless, it became a landmark publication for Marxists because in it, as its editors for the *Collected Works* edition observed, Marx “made public for the first time some of the findings of his theoretical research.”⁴³

Marx had written about the substructure-superstructure model of historical analysis before, but now he presented it in print as “the guiding principle of my studies.” He described the economic substructure as the totality of material relations and identified it as “the real foundation, on which arises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness.” In other words, the mode of production conditions the general process of social, political, and intellectual life. Thus, “it is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness.” Revolution comes with the bursting of the status quo’s economic and political arrangements by the antithetical forces produced by every system, save socialism.⁴⁴

In the seminal preface of *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, Marx insisted: “This sketch of the course of my studies in the domain of political economy is intended merely to show that my views—no matter how they may be judged and how little they conform to the interested prejudices of the ruling class—are the outcome of conscientious research carried on over many years.”⁴⁵ He claimed his ideas for science. Bourgeois economists had a vested interest in defending existing socioeconomic arrangements, but Marx portrayed himself as a man outside the system. He would now expose them as world market theorists who spoke and wrote as vassals of capitalism’s economic overlords. Pushed and pulled by the all-controlling investment class and its far-flung network of intellectual hucksters and political hacks, human society moved ineluctably into a new iron age of the world market whose only purpose was the creation of larger and larger profits for fewer and fewer shareholders.

For the depth of its research and the topical range of its concerns, *Capital* (1867) eclipsed *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*. In the intellectual history of Europe, *Capital* occupies the supreme place of eminence in the socialist left’s attack on the world that the money power of industrial capitalism created. As always, Marx sought to change reality, not merely to analyze it. *Capital* is a typical work by Marx in its combination of rigorous analysis and energetic propa-

ganda, and it remains the foremost example of applied historical materialism. It is the model book for Marxist historians.

A series of obstacles delayed the publication of *Capital*. With the founding in 1864 of the International Workingmen's Association—a socialist umbrella organization formed to unite and promote the interests of the workers throughout the world—the demands of politics were added to the strains of repeated financial crises and the anxieties of ill health in Marx's life.⁴⁶ Marx actively participated in the International's founding congress and then served as the secretary of the organization's General Council, the chief executive position. For the next several years he became immersed in committee work, public meetings, and a voluminous correspondence as well as the organization's endless feuds and crises. Marx enjoyed some of this activity because it gave him a chance to put his ideas about working-class politics to a practical test, but he had little time left for research and writing. He literally had to go into hiding in order to complete his magnum opus.

Between *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* and *Capital*, Marx read Darwin's *Origin of Species* (1859), a book that gave him a new way of thinking about the historical dialectic. Under the influence of Darwin, Marx came to view the formation of society as a process analogous to that of the natural world. In 1861 he had written to the German socialist leader Ferdinand Lassalle, with whom he would soon be carrying on one of his trademark ideological and political vendettas, "Darwin's book is very important and serves me as a natural scientific basis for the class struggle in history."⁴⁷ While tragically necessary as a phase of history's evolutionary process, capitalism fostered only private interests. The collective interests of mankind required the replacement of capitalism by communism as quickly as possible. Marx presented *Capital* as a work of activist scholarship, aimed at bringing about this transformation. He repeated many of the themes that had concerned him in *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, but in exhaustive detail.

In *Capital* Marx analyzed the historical origins, the present realities, and the future prospects of capitalism. He based his analysis on the case of England, the most advanced society of his day and "the classic example" of the economic processes that formed the subject matter of the book. He depicted the history of capitalism, from its inception, as

a succession of horrors: "If money . . . 'comes into the world with a congenital bloodstain on one cheek,' capital comes dripping from head to foot, from every pore, with blood and dirt."⁴⁸

Marx traced the origins of capitalist society to the decay of feudalism, sometime late in the fourteenth century. The making of the English working class, in the title wording of E. P. Thompson's famous book, had really begun then. Marx, like Thompson, saw the entire process as one of relentless economic exploitation, cultural deracination, and psychological trauma. Medieval man was not "freed" from feudalism in this view; he merely changed masters. From Marx's perspective, the change was immeasurably for the worse. Capitalism robbed the serfs of "their own means of production and of all guarantees of existence afforded by the old feudal arrangements." They were, in a word, expropriated: "And the history of their expropriation is written in the annals of mankind in letters of blood and fire."⁴⁹

The starting point of capitalism, then, was the moment in the late Middle Ages when a trickle of "'unattached' proletarians" began to work for wages on the newly created capitalist farms. Capitalist farming gradually replaced the subsistence farming of the feudal era. Wage labor increasingly came into use. "The whole series of thefts, outrages, and popular misery that accompanied the forcible expropriation of the people" transformed agriculture first and then began to condition manufactures.⁵⁰ Marx dated the age of manufactures from the middle of the sixteenth century to the last third of the eighteenth. The standard textbooks hailed this transformation as the triumph of the free-born Englishman, but Marx the Romantic saw it in pathological terms, as the relentless spread of a cancer through the body of society.

With the Industrial Revolution of the eighteenth century and the creation of the factory system, the masses descended to a new low of degradation and misery. In the last third of the eighteenth century there occurred "a violent encroachment like that of an avalanche in its intensity and extent [and as] all bonds of morals and nature, age and sex, day and night, were broken down . . . capitalism celebrated its orgies." Marx defined the Industrial Revolution in technological terms, as the triumph of the machine and the concentration of machine power in the factories. At every stage of the industrializing process, the workers suffered. Parliament passed the Factory Acts of 1833–1864 in response to the cries of moral outrage against the gross exploitation of

the workers, but Marx interpreted the implacable hostility of the capitalist owners to this legislation as proof of their eternal antagonism toward labor: "The directing motive, the end and aim of capitalist production, is to extract the greatest possible amount of surplus value and consequently to exploit labor-power to the greatest possible extent."⁵¹ Capitalism, he concluded, was designed to augment the wealth of the business elites at the expense of the poor. The system, as it had evolved from the late fourteenth century to the present, existed for no other reason.

Farther than any other country, England had moved into an age of industrial capitalism. The traditional socioeconomic structures of peasant agriculture had almost entirely disappeared in England, and they had been replaced by an order of things that Marx believed eventually would transform the entire world. This new industrializing and urbanizing order inspired awe and envy everywhere, but Marx refused to join the celebration. More searchingly than in *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, he challenged the establishment intellectuals who wrote reassuring books about the inevitability and desirability of modernity in its capitalist form. Edmund Burke, Nassau W. Senior, James Mill, and John Stuart Mill he dismissed as apologists for capitalism, but "the arch-Philistine" was Jeremy Bentham, "that insipid, pedantic, leather-tongued oracle of ordinary bourgeois intelligence of the nineteenth century." The money system would always find well-educated and articulate defenders for hire, Marx charged, but "the real facts, which are travestied by the economists," could not be argued out of existence: people were starving and perishing so that the householders of England could receive their unearned income. That, for Marx, was the fundamental reality of a world controlled by the capitalists for their own benefit: "the power of Asiatic and Egyptian kings [and] Etruscan theocrats . . . has in modern society been transferred to the capitalist."⁵²

Marx portrayed the capitalist system of mid-nineteenth-century England as a vampire grown monstrous on the blood of the world. At home, English workers suffered from ill health because of overwork, hideous living conditions, hazardous work environments, foul air, contaminated water, and adulterated food. Marx quoted Engels's *Condition of the Working Class in England*: "the vampire will not lose its hold on him [the worker] 'so long as there is a muscle, a nerve, a drop of

blood to be exploited.”⁵³ The laborer, cut off from a natural order, increasingly became the victim of modern culture with its pernicious artificial values. Marx thought that the family would not survive capitalism. Already male-female relations were fast decomposing and parental authority had been reduced to its formal shell. The modern industrial system had completely neglected the morals and health of working-class children. Inevitably, the cultural effects of capitalism would become the causes of new problems in the downward spiral of modern society.

What capitalist England had done to its workers was “a disgrace to any civilized community.” Marx’s vivid image of degraded agricultural labor could be applied to English labor as a whole under capitalism: “The cleanly weeded land and the uncleanly human weeds of Lincolnshire, are pole and counterpole of capitalist production.” Everywhere in England capitalism had established a coercive relationship between industrialists and the workers. Under capitalism, “it is not the workman that employs the instruments of labor, but the instruments of labor that employ the workman.”⁵⁴

Capitalism also worked its black magic abroad. As home markets became saturated by the enormous productivity of the factory system, capitalists sought new ones. It was not a coincidence that the most advanced country in the world, England, also led the way for European imperialism. “Sweet commerce” propelled the English out into the world and the rest of Europe with them.⁵⁵ Everywhere capitalism exerted an irresistible force, always accompanied by the vicious treatment of native peoples.

Capital, a precocious statement about globalization, is a gigantic blowup of *The Communist Manifesto* and *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*. A fate of unutterable ghastliness awaited the world’s workers as the capitalist system closed off all avenues of escape for them. Marx held that the historic pattern of capitalism’s opposition to gains for labor would be replicated and intensified everywhere. Whenever the workers had won concessions from the establishment, as in the Factory Acts, capitalism invariably had sought to transform their apparent victories into real defeats. It had accomplished this first and foremost through technology, which had become a servant of the status quo, doing the bidding of the capitalists for a mess of pottage. He could see nothing but a technological nightmare ahead if capitalism

continued to harness all human intelligence for the enlargement of investors' profits. "The entanglement of all peoples in the net of the world market" would bring such misery to mankind that revolution would become inevitable. Then "the knell of capitalist private property sounds [and] the expropriators are expropriated."⁵⁶

Capital is Marx's supreme achievement as a thinker. It is his fullest and most thoroughly researched explanation of why modern capitalist society poses a mortal threat to the future of mankind. From Marx's masterpiece a mighty stream of social criticism flows. The vast Marxist literature about the imposition of capitalist hegemony, the reification of bourgeois culture, the one-dimensionality of man under capitalism, and the prevalence of false consciousness in the modern world is a network of rivulets crisscrossing the intellectual landscape of the twentieth century. Gramsci, Lukács, Marcuse, and the Frankfurt School as a whole take their general direction from the Marx of *Capital*. Marx's assertions in this book about the domination of the capitalist over the worker, of the thing over the man, of the product over the producer—"of dead labor, that dominates, and pumps dry, living labor"—unite them all in a recognizably Marxist tradition of social and cultural criticism.⁵⁷

The Civil War in France

Although the publication of *Capital* vastly augmented Marx's prestige and authority as a socialist thinker, he had to contend with numerous factional disputes in the International. Mazzinians, Proudhonists, Lassalleans, and Bakuninists chafed under his leadership, and in the end factionalism destroyed the organization. The focus of fantastic fears by government authorities and equally fantastic hopes by expectant revolutionaries, the International had only a few hundred members in England and about as many in Germany and the United States.⁵⁸ The numbers were greater in Italy, Spain, and France, but so was the problem of factionalism in those countries. At its peak, the total number of members in affiliated societies stood at 25,173.⁵⁹ In short, the International always remained a fairly small and divided organization. When the Franco-Prussian War broke out in 1870, Marx indulged his hatred of Louis Napoleon and sided with Prussia, thereby contributing to the parochial disputes that had plagued the Interna-

tional from the beginning. France's defeat and the ensuing revolutionary situation created by the Paris Commune of 1871, however, seemed to confirm his judgment.

Even in *Capital*, his greatest book, Marx could not answer the question that his system begs: if history, through the operation of the laws of dialectical materialism, is carrying mankind irrepressibly forward to communism, why should a violent communist revolution be necessary at all? Marx himself did not draw the conclusion that the workers could passively await final success as a token of history's benevolence toward them. Economic laws only guaranteed the possibility of victory, but the proletariat itself would have to take the initiative in its own redemption. The Bolshevik triumph in the Russian Revolution of 1917 and the emergence of the Kremlin as the cynosure of world communism notwithstanding, acrimonious disputes over the exact nature of this initiative would keep Marxism a permanently divided movement of denominations, sects, and cults.

Until 1871 Marx thought about revolution essentially in terms of the political and economic dynamics that had characterized the great French Revolution of 1789, but the Paris Commune gave him a new understanding of the subject. *The Civil War in France* is Marx's analysis of the Commune, which he considered the greatest historical event of his lifetime. Lasting from 18 March to 28 May 1871, the Commune resulted in grisly acts of terrorism by the communards and, at the end, a shocking loss of life. The army of the National Assembly killed more than twenty thousand people. Afterward, the French government jailed or deported thousands more. Marx had foreseen a tragedy of this kind when in 1870 he had warned that an insurrection would be an act of desperate folly. Yet, despite all the violence and the ultimate defeat of the Commune, he came to see it as a noble failure, one that exemplified the historical initiative of the masses and furthered the cause of communism. In his book, Marx hailed the Commune as a new departure of world historic importance and "the glorious harbinger of a new society." As Engels would write in his 1891 introduction to *The Civil War in France*, faithfully reflecting the view of his longtime collaborator: "Look at the Paris Commune. That was the dictatorship of the Proletariat."⁶⁰

Marx, with a precision not always characteristic of his writing, explained in *The Civil War in France* what the role of revolutionary

violence should be in proletarian politics. The scattered fragments of his thought lend themselves to a wide variety of interpretations on many questions, as the subsequent history of Marxism would reveal, but on the question of revolution this book made perfectly clear Marx's definitive answer: violence by the state warrants a violent response from the proletariat, provided that the revolutionary cause is thereby advanced. The Commune had shown Marx what he called the authentic way of modern revolution. He vigorously defended the violence of the communards as just and reasonable. They had been bitterly criticized, above all, for their execution of sixty-four hostages, including the Archbishop of Paris. Marx, the realpolitiker of revolution, queried, "Was even this last check upon the unscrupulous ferocity of bourgeois governments—the taking of hostages—to be made a mere sham of?" Revolutionaries had to be hard for the benefit of posterity. Before the denouement Marx wrote to an admirer in Germany, Dr. Ludwig Kugelmann, on 12 April 1871, that if the Commune went down to defeat it would be because of its excessive "good nature" and "conscientious scruples."⁶¹

Marx lived another decade. He continued to write and to speak for the communist revolution, but ill health, family tragedy, and fits of depression stalked him. His long list of ailments included incapacitating headaches, liver disease, carbuncles, insomnia, bronchitis, and pleurisy. Trips to Carlsbad and to other water cure resorts became a regular feature of his life, but the medicinal effects of these activities never lasted long. Even his mental powers began to falter toward the end, when it became impossible for him to organize his thousands of pages of notes for the final volumes of *Capital*—a task that would be left for Engels to perform. The death of his wife in 1881 from cancer left Marx a bereaved and lonely old man. The time he spent with his three daughters dispirited him further. They all had miserable lives: Jenny, unhappily married to the penniless Charles Longuet and physically exhausted from overwork and worry about money, died of bladder cancer in 1883 at the age of 38; Laura, similarly circumstanced in a marriage to the improvident and shiftless author of *The Right to Be Lazy*, Paul Lafargue, lost all of her children in infancy and died a suicide in 1911 at 66; and Eleanor, the youngest and an aspiring actress,

careened from one nervous crisis to another before committing suicide over Edward Aveling—"an inveterate and shameless deadbeat"—in 1898 at 43.⁶²

Marx died about two months after his daughter Jenny, on 14 March 1883, at a time when Marxism was merely one more socialist movement on the left fringe of Europe's ideological spectrum. On many key issues, Marx left his followers with a grab bag of possible interpretations. In the years immediately following his death, Engels, Karl Kautsky, and August Bebel sought to impose added theoretical coherence on Marxism, but it would remain a movement torn by disputes, above all over the eternal question of revolution. No unanimity of view about what Marx meant or intended on this and many other questions has ever existed among the people who consider themselves his followers. Italian Marxists would be found in the hottest parts of all these battles.

Carlo Cafiero: Prophet of Anarchist Communism

A part of the bourgeoisie is desirous of redressing social grievances, in order to secure the continued existence of bourgeois society.

—Karl Marx, *The Communist Manifesto*

Published history does not record when the men of the Cafiero family abandoned the sea of Naples to become landowners in Barletta on the Adriatic coast in the extreme South, but young Carlo, born in 1846, grew up on the family lore about his seafaring forebears. He never liked farming or his native Puglia and sought to escape as soon as possible to Naples, where in 1864 he began to study law at the university. Upon taking his degree, Cafiero briefly pursued a career in diplomacy. He moved to Florence, then the nation's capital, and began to make his way. Contemporaries described him as a wealthy, elegant, handsome, and well-educated young man with a seemingly limitless future before him. The choice of diplomacy, however, proved unfortunate. The diplomats and the politicians bored him. He did not have to work and soon quit his job.¹

For the next few years Cafiero took up and abandoned in rapid succession a series of intellectual interests, including Oriental languages and Islam. He had been interested in religion as a child, and his family had thought he might become a priest. They had sent him to a seminary in nearby Molfetta, but he had hated the place. Cafiero very early lost all interest in Catholicism and came to detest the Catholic Church as a repressive force in Italian life. He continued to be fascinated by religion, however, and to look for a variety of it that would satisfy him.

While in Florence, Cafiero frequented the radical circle of Telemaco Signorini, a leading member of the Macchiaioli school of painters and with his caustic scenes of life in prisons, insane asylums, and houses of prostitution a severe critic of post-Risorgimento Italy.² This

encounter seems to have been the beginning of the long road that would lead Cafiero to his life's work as a revolutionary. Still vague about his future, he set out for Paris and witnessed the last months of the Second Empire. From July 1870 to May 1871 Cafiero resided in London, where he entered the orbit of Marx and Engels. These leaders of the International Workingmen's Association dazzled him. Marx in particular struck him as the most brilliant man he had ever known. Despite the crises in their subsequent relationship, Marx's originality, as well as the energy and confidence with which he expressed himself, always compelled Cafiero's admiration.

For their part, Marx and Engels welcomed Cafiero to their cause. In Italy no Marxists of note had been found to combat the rival leftist theories of Bakunin and Mazzini. They asked him to go back to Italy—to Naples—where Bakuninists and Mazzinians held sway over the left. Cafiero accepted the offer, to become the special agent in Italy of the International's General Council, with all the enthusiasm of an idealistic youth who feels at last that the true meaning of his existence is about to be revealed to him. He left London on 12 May and arrived in Florence just as the Paris Commune went down to defeat. Soon afterward he made the journey to Naples and began sending reports of his activities back to London.

Cafiero's reports constitute the main documentary source of his activities in this period of Marxism's beginnings in Italy. In tone, they reflect the eager and upbeat boosterism of a young branch manager's assurances to his superiors in the home office that the company product, in this case revolution, is moving briskly. Cafiero did not have to wait for Pasquale Villari's landmark exposé of Neapolitan poverty in his "Southern Letters" (1875) to learn about the city's deplorable conditions. He vividly commented on them in a letter of 28 June 1871 to Engels: "The great masses of the suffering exist in a state of barbarism, unconscious of every human progress, weighed down by the yoke, knowing nothing, believing firmly in being born to serve and to suffer on this earth, hoping to go on to enjoy the mercy of God in paradise [through the] intercession of the Most Holy Virgin and by virtue of the blessed blood of San Gennaro."³ All of the Italian South, he continued, lived in "a state of barbarism." He told Engels that the Spanish,

the Bourbons, and the Catholic Church had created the tragedy of the South; now the government of Italy had come along with the vile mission of keeping this horrendous status quo substantially intact. Cafiero confidently predicted that the irrepressible force of class struggle would lead to revolution.

The class struggle to which Cafiero referred, however, was not the one that Marx had in mind. Backward Italy lacked an industrial proletariat, but it did have plenty of poor people as well as a class of vicious exploiters. The situation was pregnant with revolution, but who would deliver the baby: Marx, Mazzini, or Bakunin? These three doctors of revolution vied with one another to command the loyalty of the Italian left in the years after the Paris Commune. From the very beginning of his duties as the special agent in Italy of the General Council, Cafiero seems to have been drawn toward some kind of amalgamation between Marxism and Bakuninism. Mazzinianism he castigated without mercy. He ridiculed Mazzini's nationalist invocation of "God and People" as obscurantist nonsense. Mazzini's denunciation of the Paris Commune as a diabolical perversion of democratic values inspired Cafiero to flights of revolutionary invective. Completely oblivious to "the tyranny of capital," Mazzini had no understanding of the contemporary situation: "The poor old man cannot comprehend that he has had his day."⁴ About Bakunin, in contrast, Cafiero said nothing critical in his initial reports to London.

Engels duly expressed his appreciation for Cafiero's observations of the Italian scene. Yet he sought to bring Cafiero around to his point of view about the dangerousness of Bakunin's ideas. Cafiero's silence about anarchism plainly worried Engels. He repeatedly reminded his young agent that Mazzini was not the only enemy of true communism in Italy. Bakunin knew absolutely nothing about political economy, Engels charged. From this confusion about the economic basics of every political situation, all of Bakunin's many other errors stemmed. "Bakunin has his own theory," Engels concluded, "consisting in a mixture of communism and Proudhonism."⁵ Engels wanted Cafiero to show as much zeal in attacking the Bakuninists as he did the Mazzinians.

Cafiero did not see Bakuninism as a threat to Marxism at all. He wrote back to Engels on 12 July 1871: "Regarding Bakunin, I can assure you that he has many friends here in Naples who share many of

his principles, who have with him a certain community of views, but that he has a sect, a party that dissents from the principles of the General Council, I can deny completely.”⁶ In fact, Cafiero entertained a warm sympathy for the Bakuninists he knew in Naples and wanted to keep them in the International. He thought that the Bakuninists and the Marxists had much more in common than either group cared to acknowledge. Cafiero saw his task as one of creating unity between them.

Engels would have none of Cafiero’s assurances about the Bakuninists. On 16 July 1871 he insisted that “it would be better to do without them entirely.” Engels encouraged Cafiero to find other allies in Naples. The Bakuninists were “a sect” within the International, he warned. Two weeks later he added: “the Bakuninists are a tiny minority in the Association and are the *only* ones who on every occasion cause dissension.” He regarded the Swiss anarchists of Bakunin’s immediate circle as the worst offenders against the unity of the International.⁷

Cafiero waited nearly two months to answer Engels and then did not respond to his attacks on Bakunin. Instead he described his run-ins with the Neapolitan police and their general campaign of repression against left-wingers of all stripes: “Here the government is in full reaction, and the malcontents grow in number day by day at a geometric rate, battenning on the plague of misery of the proletariat.” He thought that “the most terrible social revolution” could break out at any time. The next month he explained to Engels that the misery of the peasants had made it possible for the International to sink “deep roots in Italy, and no force will ever be able to pull them up.”⁸

On 29 November 1871 Cafiero at last tried to address Engels’s complaints about Bakunin. He continued to insist that Engels’s charges against the anarchist leader lacked a grounding in reality. Cafiero found in Bakunin’s writings “words of profound esteem and respect for Marx.” Indeed, Cafiero judged him to be an asset for the International: “Bakunin has many personal friends in Italy, having long lived here, and he corresponds with some of them. Because of his past [in Naples] and the continuous work he performs for our cause, he is loved even by many who do not know him personally.”⁹

Engels responded to Cafiero’s professions of admiration for Bakunin with a reproving silence. Cafiero tried to elicit a response from him on 21 January 1872, but Engels remained silent. By this time

Cafiero had begun to waver in his Marxist political convictions. Marxism remained his basic frame of reference for an understanding of capitalism, but the social situation in which he found himself was precapitalist. Marx's ideas about capitalism and the industrial proletariat did not apply to nineteenth-century Naples. Bakunin's ideas about the revolutionary potential of the peasants and the lumpenproletariat did.

Gradually during his 1871–1872 stay in Naples Cafiero reached the conclusion that he could no longer serve as the special agent of Marx and Engels. Accompanied by the Neapolitan anarchist Giuseppe Fanelli, he met with Bakunin in Locarno, Switzerland, on 20 May 1872. Cafiero reacted to Bakunin with the same kind of admiring declarations that he had made a year earlier to Marx, only this time his emotions, as well as his mind, were engaged. Bakunin had lived the revolution; Marx had only written about it. To unrivaled charisma as a revolutionary leader Bakunin added enormous personal charm, something else at which Marx could not match him.

Yet another advantage on Bakunin's side was his first-hand knowledge of Naples and the political dynamics there. Bakunin's connections to Italy went back to his father, who had been a student at the University of Padua and had been stationed in Florence and Turin as a diplomat. Beginning in the 1840s, Bakunin had known numerous Risorgimento patriots and, though differing from them ideologically, he shared their dream of overthrowing the hated Congress of Vienna status quo. He had lived in Florence in 1864 and 1865 and then in Naples until 1867. In Naples he found "a fertile breeding ground for the subterranean intrigues so dear to his heart."¹⁰ Attaching himself to the circle of Italian and foreign revolutionaries subsidized by Princess Zoe Obolensky—a radical émigré who found life more congenial in Italy than in her native Russia—Bakunin encountered numerous alienated intellectuals. He soon became the ideological leader of that group. During this Neapolitan sojourn he developed some of his most distinctive ideas about the exceptional revolutionary potential of the peasants and the lumpenproletariat, making many converts to the cause of anarchism. He thought that Italy could collapse at any moment and wrote numerous articles, essays, and letters in support of revolution. The key to the Italian situation, Bakunin claimed, was the intellectual class, which he described as "completely adrift, without prospects, and

with no way out.” These individuals had come from the bourgeoisie but were entirely alienated from it. They now served as “the most ardent, sincere, audacious, and tireless” advocates of revolution. He saw them as the shock troops of anarchism.¹¹

Following Princess Obolensky, Bakunin left Italy for Switzerland in August of 1867. His activities in Switzerland during the late 1860s and early 1870s continued to arouse Marx’s suspicions. Cafiero had failed to smooth over the differences between the two men and now had to choose between them. He remained in Locarno for a month in the late spring of 1872, and by the time he returned to Italy Bakunin had made a thoroughgoing anarchist of him.

Back in Italy, Cafiero wrote a letter of leave-taking to Engels. He blurted out the truth of his meeting with Bakunin: “After a few moments of conversation we realized that both of us were in complete accord on principles.” Under Bakunin’s tutelage, he had come to see the oppressiveness inherent in the dictatorship of the proletariat concept: “Now, my dear friend, permit me to speak to you with frankness. Your *communist program* is, for me, in its positive aspect a great reactionary absurdity.” Cafiero now professed to have a horror of the state in all of its forms, including the state of the workers.¹²

Engels had kept his silence for nearly a year, but now he sent Cafiero a brutal letter. He accused Cafiero of showing his letters to Bakunin. The 10 May 1872 issue of the *Bulletin Jurassien* had carried an article about odious calumnies written by Engels to friends in Italy. Engels knew exactly who these “friends” were. “I have not written letters to anyone in Italy except to you,” he icily declared. Cafiero, therefore, had to be the source of this embarrassing disclosure. What, Engels wondered, had he done to deserve such a betrayal from one he always had treated “with extreme sincerity and confidence”? Cafiero did not respond.¹³

Now Bakunin’s man in Italy, Cafiero set about helping the other anarchists to purge the few elements of Marxism remaining in Italy. At a 4–6 August 1872 congress in Rimini, the anarchists called for a complete break with the London-based General Council. Cafiero, as Bakunin’s favorite, served as the president of this meeting. Another of Bakunin’s Italian lieutenants, Andrea Costa, became the secretary for the congress. The Bakuninists completely dominated the proceedings at Rimini, and it surprised no one when the delegates voted to break

with the General Council. They further decided to create an international association of their own with anarchists from other European countries, and this new organization came into being later that year at Saint Imier, Switzerland, where Cafiero acted as the co-president of the congress. Plagued by these and other defections, the Marx- and Engels-led International slipped into a moribund state that ended in formal dissolution.

Cafiero, still only 26 in 1872, received such recognition at the congresses of Rimini and Saint Imier in large part because of his role as the chief financial sponsor of the anarchist movement. He became Bakunin's new patron, taking over from Princess Obolensky when her estranged husband cut off the generous allowance that he had been sending to Italy and then to Switzerland. Cafiero paid the expenses for many of the delegates. From this time on he put his immense fortune entirely at Bakunin's service. In the following year he bought Bakunin "la Baronata," a villa in Switzerland, the repair and improvement of which over the next year drained him of most of his remaining money. At first he appears to have shed his fortune with the gladness of a man leaving a leper colony, cured at last of a condition that had put him beyond the pale of the only company he truly prized, that of the poor. The curse of money had ruined him, he thought, as it did everyone in one way or another. There can be no doubt about the fervency of his belief in Bakunin's ideas as the world's best chance of ending the money curse forever. Nevertheless, personal animosity eventually arose between the two men as Cafiero came to suspect Bakunin of extravagance and a most un-anarchist-like devotion to the material well-being of his young wife, Antonia.¹⁴

Meanwhile, Cafiero purchased more than 250 military rifles and pistols for the uprising that he and Bakunin felt certain could occur at any moment. All over Italy, worsening economic conditions and unemployment sparked angry demonstrations. With other anarchist leaders, notably Costa and a very youthful Errico Malatesta (1853–1932), Cafiero and Bakunin tried to coordinate a national plan of action for August of 1874. In a propaganda statement written by Cafiero, the anarchists announced that the redemption of Italy's peasants was at hand. The conspirators envisaged simultaneous outbreaks of revolutionary violence in Tuscany, the Marches, Lazio, Puglia, the Campania, and Sicily, with the epicenter in Bologna where Bakunin himself would

lead operations. The authorities, however, knew about the conspiracy from the beginning. They arrested Costa, the insurrection's chief organizer in Italy, before a single shot could be fired. Worse, the peasants—the intended beneficiaries of the uprising—refused to accept the Bakuninists as liberators and betrayed them to the police, who crushed the conspiracy with ease. Bakunin ignominiously fled the scene disguised as a priest. Most of the other leaders ended up in jail. The fiasco of August 1874 did enormous damage to the prestige of the anarchist movement in Italy.¹⁵

In Russia to be with a revolutionary named Olimpia Kutusov during the spring and early summer of 1874, Cafiero did not participate in the Bologna uprising. He had met Olimpia at the Baronata and then had gone to Russia to marry her. He did not marry for love, but only to give Olimpia asylum in the West when Russian officials attempted to detain her as a subversive. Although Cafiero struck many of the people who have left descriptions of him as a warm and personable man, he was absorbed completely by his life's work. Olimpia interested him not as a woman but as a comrade. His passion he appears to have reserved in its entirety for the cause.¹⁶

Quarrels over the Baronata and the disastrous outcome of the 1874 uprising badly damaged Cafiero's relationship with Bakunin, who died two years later. The two men were eventually reconciled, but Bakunin never again had a commanding presence in Cafiero's life. Cafiero resumed his restless search for the truth of revolution. In 1875 he began a brief but significant association with *La Plebe*, the first daily socialist newspaper in Italy. He proved not to be a very good journalist. Never a facile writer, he struggled with the demands of daily newspaper work. He claimed to prefer manual labor anyway, which he thought more noble than phrasemaking. The once wealthy playboy now had to work for a living, and he took any job he could get, including emptying the trash at a hotel. No matter. His inner life teemed with significance for him.

An article that Cafiero did get published in *La Plebe* in November 1875 provides an idea of that inner life. In "The Times Are Not Yet Ripe," Cafiero revealed his boundless and ever youthful passion for revolution. The times are never ripe for revolution, he began, unless one is a real revolutionary. Many people who claim to be revolutionaries care only to strike a revolutionary pose while simultaneously ac-

cepting, as a practical matter, the reality of the status quo. He condemned liberal progressives as the worst enemies of genuine progress. They could always be counted on to complain passionately about the evils of society without for a moment wishing to change anything in a systemic way. These professional keepers of society's moral conscience accepted the validity of revolution in principle. They could all think of revolutions they would support, but not the one that Italy needed right now. That particular revolution frightened them because it would end the status quo in which they ensconced themselves, really enjoying the best of both worlds, as morally superior critics of the establishment on which their physical ease and social status depended. To such individuals the times were never ripe for revolution, only for talk about it, for the beautiful gesture of defiance, at which they excelled, perhaps even convincing themselves of their sincerity and worth as paladins of suffering humanity. For the real revolutionary, though, "the times are always ripe to strike at injustice." There was no time like the present, Cafiero concluded, to begin the crusade for the recovery of "the greater part of humanity that languishes *without thought, without dignity, without life*."¹⁷

After his rupture with Bakunin, Cafiero's closest collaborator long remained Emilio Covelli, also from Puglia but at that time living in Naples. From similar class backgrounds, Covelli and Cafiero had been born in the same year and had studied first at the seminary in Molfetta and then at the law faculty of the University of Naples. The paths of the two young men diverged at last upon their graduation from the university. Cafiero joined the diplomatic corps in Florence, and Covelli continued his academic studies at two German universities: Heidelberg and Berlin. At the University of Berlin, Covelli attended the lectures of Eugen Dühring, a socialist thinker in conflict with Marx over the role of class in history and many other issues as well. In this way, Covelli came into contact with Marx's thought. He did not share Dühring's negative assessment of Marx. Indeed, Covelli wrote an admiring review of *Capital* for the *Rivista Partenopea* of Naples, the first notice in Italy of Marx's masterpiece. In addition, he wrote other articles about Marx's ideas, most notably an 1874 essay, "L'economia politica e la scienza."¹⁸

By the time Covelli returned to Italy, in the mid-1870s, he possessed a linguistic and scholarly preparation second to none in the country

for an appreciation of Marxism. His path then intersected again with that of Cafiero. He visited Cafiero in Locarno and afterward joined the Neapolitan section of his old friend's anarchist association. Roberto Michels (1876–1936), the Italianized German sociologist, once noted that men like Cafiero and Covelli became anarchists out of an aversion to the authoritarian character of Marxism without repudiating the essential core of Marx's critique of capitalism. For Michels, Marxism and Bakuninism functioned as two intimately related systems of radical thought. Both began with an obliterating indictment of capitalism. Both then sought the same socialist ends, though by different means. One should not skip over the differences, Michels thought, but the conventional wisdom about Bakuninism and Marxism skipped over the similarities. Marxism entered "the mentality of Italian socialists" through Bakunin. In Michels's telling of the history of Italian socialism, Bakunin appears as a kind of John the Baptist, preparing the way for the gospel of Marxism: "One can say that the Italian workers, saturated with Bakuninist ideas, were then psychologically prepared to receive the ideas of Marx."¹⁹

The Michels thesis about the close family relationship between Bakuninism and Marxism helps to explain the ideological itineraries of Covelli and Cafiero, as they moved back and forth between these two ideologies without apparent conflict. Neither man thought he had to make an either/or choice between them. In Cafiero's case the move back to a contemplation of Marxism cannot be said to have been sudden or sharp because all along, since his initial encounter with Marx in London, he had admired the great man. Bakunin himself always acknowledged Marx's exceptional brilliance and originality. No one who knew Marx or had a first-hand acquaintance with his writings honestly could do otherwise, Cafiero concurred.

The appearance of Covelli in Locarno in 1875 no doubt intensified Cafiero's interest in Marxism, as he continued to take stock of revolutionary ideas and techniques. The complete failure of the 1874 uprising had mortified the anarchists, Cafiero included. He certainly did not give up on revolution, but obviously something had gone terribly wrong and needed to be remedied. Still and always a man of anarchist action, Cafiero thought that revolutionary combat would reveal the secret of how the peasant proletariat would win its ultimate victory over the landlords and the capitalists. Searching for the right combination

of revolutionary concepts and tactics, he began to develop a synthesis of anarchism and communism, which in his mind meant a world without property or authority. Because of the anarchist element in this formula, the propaganda of the deed remained obligatory. During the winter of 1876–1877 Cafiero and Malatesta began to plot just such a deed, one that would avenge the shame of 1874 and pave the way for the triumph of the revolution. Malatesta, born into a landowning family in Capua and a one-time medical student at the University of Naples, would become the major figure of Italian anarchism in the late nineteenth century and one of Cafiero's closest friends.

This time the anarchist plan called for a concentrated attack on a part of the country known since the 1875 publication of Villari's shocking articles to be corroded with anti-establishment feeling and prone to social violence. The agricultural villages in the Matese mountains, not far from Naples, had been a focal point of the Brigandage, the peasants' post-Risorgimento war against the state. In one violent episode alone, in August 1861, a local peasant band had killed forty-five soldiers and an officer, prompting a scorched-earth response from the state that had resulted in numerous executions and deportations.²⁰ The ensuing "pacification" had been one of the most brutal of the Brigandage, and the area still seethed with peasant discontent. Here, Cafiero and Malatesta thought, a decisive blow for the revolution could be struck. Accordingly, in April 1877 they assembled an armed force whose mission was to touch off a peasant revolution against the Italian state.

Once again, the police knew about the plot from the beginning. They had easily infiltrated the anarchist movement, whose aversion to leadership and organization made security impossible. Even in the Matese mountains, the anarchists ritualistically changed leaders every day lest they be corrupted by power. Chaos and anarchy, side by side in the thesaurus, became one in actuality as well.

With the authorities tracking their every move, Cafiero and the others descended on the village of Letino, proclaiming freedom, justice, and socialism to a crowd of stupefied peasants. Cafiero addressed these people and tried to explain the character of the revolution unfolding before their eyes. They liked what he had to say about the end of taxes and conscription. "Long live the International, long live the communist republic of Letino," they cried as he finished speaking. Af-

ter burning some land deed documents in the communal archive, the anarchists declared Letino liberated and moved down the road to their next conquest.²¹

At nearby Gallo the rebel band informed the parish priest of their plans for the town. He turned to the faithful and reassured them: "Be not afraid. There will be a change of government and a burning of papers. That is all." More talk about the social revolution followed. The anarchists then burned some land deeds as well as a portrait of the king, Victor Emmanuel II. Another town had been liberated.²²

The illusoriness of these two conquests soon became manifest. Even before they could be intercepted and imprisoned, a blizzard caught the anarchists completely unprepared. Miserable from cold and hunger, they talked about making a last stand against the rapidly approaching government troops. Unfortunately for these would-be martyrs, their weapons, soaked from the storm, would not fire. The soldiers captured nearly all of the rebels without resistance. One group of twenty-six anarchists fell into the hands of the peasants they had come to liberate, who promptly turned them over to the authorities.²³ Once again, as three years earlier, the anarchists suffered a total defeat at the hands of the state. With their inept revolutionary tactics, the anarchists themselves had proved to be the state's front-line weapon against anarchism.

The so-called Benevento debacle of 1877 sealed the fate of anarchism in Italy. It swiftly declined as the dominant force on the Italian left. Without the charismatic personality of Bakunin for inspiration, the Italian anarchists were bound to experience a crisis of confidence. Even while he lived, the movement suffered from factionalism. Extremists like Cafiero, who constantly pressed for revolution, had to deal with relative moderates like Costa, who after the failure of 1874 began the process of reevaluation that would lead him to embrace legalitarian socialism by the end of the decade. Thus, during Bakunin's lifetime his movement had already ceased to be monolithic, if any anarchist movement can ever be such.

Moreover, the problem of anarchism's intellectual inconsistency became more evident with the removal from the scene of Bakunin's charm and spellbinding eloquence. He had been a devastating counterpuncher against Marx, showing great perceptiveness in noting the potential for tyranny in the dictatorship-of-the-proletariat theory.

Bakunin's own political theories, centering on the notion of a revolutionary elite that would function as a "collective, invisible dictatorship," amounted in practice, however, to a much less clearly delineated alternative to Marxism than he imagined.²⁴ It became increasingly obvious to the many anarchists who flocked to the cause of legalitarian socialism after Bakunin's death that the conspiracies he promoted of self-appointed judges and jurors, with no concern for due process or checks and balances, also contained the seeds of tyranny. Indeed, an anarchist cabal is one of the most absolute forms of authority. Bakunin never had resolved the contradiction between his ideal of perfect freedom for all men and his insistence that he should get to decide how this ideal would be implemented and defined.

Now 30 years old, Cafiero would spend the next sixteen months in prison. The charges against him and his confederates were extremely serious: conspiracy against the state, armed subversion, arson, destruction of state property and equipment, robbery, theft of public funds, and the murder of one carabinieri and the wounding of another. For a time it seemed that for Cafiero and the other ringleaders the state would seek the death penalty. All ended happily for the anarchist prisoners because of the timing of King Victor Emmanuel's death in 1878. When the courts decided that the Benevento uprising qualified as a political crime, the prisoners were able to benefit from the amnesty decreed by the new king, Umberto I. A jubilant crowd of two thousand well-wishers greeted the prisoners upon their release. A much publicized celebratory feast ensued. In the classic *Governo e governati in Italia* (1882), Pasquale Turiello called this celebration an ominous sign of "great significance," one that plainly indicated the extent to which the country's political institutions had failed to find a satisfactory rapport with the populace.²⁵

Cafiero on Marxism

While in prison Cafiero read the French translation of *Capital*. The book electrified him with its brilliance, and he immediately set about writing a commentary on it. By the time Cafiero left prison in August 1878, he had a short book ready for publication. The following February his old newspaper, *La Plebe*, began to publish installments, in Italian translation, of the thirty-first chapter of *Capital*, "The Genesis of

Industrial Capitalism,” and in March the paper announced the imminent publication of a “compendium” of the entire book. On 20 June 1879 *Il Capitale di Carlo Marx brevemente compendiato da Carlo Cafiero, Libro Primo, Sviluppo della produzione capitalista* appeared in print. The Word had reached Italy.

In the preface Cafiero lamented that such a great original socialist thinker as Marx could be “in fact unknown in Italy.” Cafiero wanted his own book to be a faithful guide to “the new truth that demolishes, crushes, and throws to the winds the centuries-old edifice of errors and lies.” Revolutionaries the world over would find in it the intellectual armor they needed for the decisive battle against capitalism. Marx had given revolutionaries “a great quantity of new arms, of instruments and machines of every sort that his genius has been able to derive from all the modern sciences.” Where virtually nothing had existed before, Marx had conceived a universe of scientifically socialist meaning. Cafiero thought that *Capital* towered over every other intellectual achievement of the age.²⁶

The *Compendio* included in its 126 pages extensive passages from the meaty analytical sections of *Capital*, giving Italian readers their first substantial exposure to Marx’s seminal book. As Cafiero summarized the contents of *Capital*, he paid special attention to its major concepts: the labor theory of value, appropriation, the division of labor, capital accumulation, and alienation. The most vivid passages in *Capital* deal with the misery of the working class under capitalism, and Cafiero emphasized this theme above all: if the capitalists pay any attention to the worker, “it is only to study the best way to exploit him.” Cafiero devoted many pages to the sad effects of the capitalist factory system. Marx, he asserted, had done more than any other revolutionary thinker to explain the true purpose and history of factory life under capitalism, which never lacked for “theologians who explain all and justify all with their eternal laws.” The capitalists could afford high-priced intellectual talent to defend the status quo, but *Capital* laid bare for all to see the whole corrupt, immoral, and destructive system.²⁷

Marx had taken most of his examples from England, but Cafiero noted for the Italian audience that “all modern nations” were already or nearly on the English road to industrialization. Therefore, the social and economic developments of England served as a window from

which the other countries of Europe could look onto their own future. The Italians had another reason to read *Capital*. The gross and savage exploitation of the English peasantry under capitalism, so vividly described by Marx, would give the Italians an understanding not of their future but of their present. Marx's heartrending description of the demise of English agriculture contained many arresting parallels with the contemporary Italian situation. Motivated by their insatiable greed, the "money men" controlled and transformed everything. Progress was a euphemism used to obscure the fundamental realities of the modern world. Progress did not come about spontaneously as a result of a Promethean quest for the betterment of mankind, but rather as a series of technological, cultural, and social shifts on behalf of the masters of the world.²⁸

The masters would shrink from nothing to maintain their domination. Now, thanks to European imperialism, they controlled the whole world as never before. "A sad story of blood" had extended the "benefits" of modern capitalism to all peoples. Here Cafiero permitted himself a personal aside. Despite capitalism's appalling record of violence and cruelty in imposing European imperialism around the world, bourgeois justice had solemnly indicted the anarchists for their "bloodlust" (*la libidine di sangue*) at Benevento in 1877. Revolutionary violence paled into insignificance by comparison with the horrors of capitalism. Revolution alone, of the kind analyzed by Marx in *Capital*, could restore "the equilibrium of the most complete order, peace, and happiness" to a world disordered, violated, and traumatized by capitalism. Man, by nature rational and communal, lived an unnatural life under the capitalist system, which reduced every aspect of society to a monstrous orgy of acquisitiveness and self-absorption.²⁹

Cafiero sent two copies of the *Compendio* to Marx in London. In an accompanying letter that began "Stimatissimo Signore" (Most Esteemed Sir), he apologized for not letting Marx see the manuscript before publication. It had been his intention to do so, but then a publisher had unexpectedly made him an offer. He explained to Marx: "Fear of losing a favorable opportunity prompted me to consent to the proposed publication." Cafiero closed with an expression of "the deepest respect" for Marx and the hope that he had done right by *Capital*. He did not mention his own desertion of the International in 1872.³⁰

Marx replied with high praise for Cafiero's book. Although Marx

wrote to Cafiero in French, he had made a serious study of Italian in his youth and read the language quite well. Most such summaries of his work, Marx complained, frustrated him with their superficiality, misrepresentation, and outright fabrications. Cafiero, he continued, had mastered almost all of his ideas. He had noticed only “one apparent deficiency” in the *Compendio*: Cafiero had not addressed his argument about how “the necessary material conditions for the emancipation of the proletariat are spontaneously generated by the development of capitalist exploitation.” Marx, likewise tactfully ignoring the unpleasantness of 1872, encouraged Cafiero to return to the omitted theme in a future work of exegesis.³¹

Cafiero set out to follow Marx’s advice. While living in Lugano in 1880, he began another essay on Marxist thought, this time in the form of a dramatic dialogue between two characters, Crepafame (Dying of Hunger) and Succiasanguine (Bloodsucker). In September the following year the Swiss police sequestered this manuscript before it could be completed. Cafiero’s notoriety as a violent anarchist made it increasingly difficult for him to avoid run-ins with the police.

In November 1880 Cafiero did succeed in publishing an update of his views about Marx, “Anarchy and Communism,” a summary of an address he had given earlier that year to an anarchist congress. By this time the conjoining of Bakuninism and Marxism into a single socialist synthesis had become the supreme cause of his intellectual life. He saw anarchism and communism as synonyms for liberty and equality, the two fundamental terms “of our revolutionary ideal.” “From each according to his means, to each according to his needs”: with these immortal words Marx had pithily summed up the essence of the most exalted social system yet devised. Nevertheless, communism required a corrective that anarchism alone could furnish. The statist political solution of communism, in the form of the dictatorship of the proletariat, remained a blot on Marx’s system. The stateless polity of anarchism would bring Marxism to perfection, in the same way that the unparalleled scientific rigor of *Capital* would give anarchist theory the socioeconomic insights it lacked. Under the anarchist-communist synthesis, men at last would become what nature had intended them to be: collaborators, friends, and brothers.³²

Cafiero welcomed the technology of the anarchist-communist future as well. The capitalists had harnessed technology for their own

profit. With the profit motive eliminated, technology would be designed to serve the genuine needs of all mankind. The only motive for the technological research of the future would be the public good. After the triumph of socialism, there would be no need for war. All the money, manpower, and intelligence currently devoted by capitalists to the war machines of the nation states would be transferred, in the new order, to education, medicine, and pensions. In addition, the vast sums spent by the wealthy on their obscene luxuries would go into the general fund. Because of this revolutionary reallocation of society's resources, humanity would enter its golden age: "work [would] lose its ignoble aspect" as men, in overcoming capitalism, became one with nature.³³

In the second installment of "Anarchy and Communism," published two weeks after the first one, Cafiero held up the working-class family as an "example, in miniature, of anarchist-communism." In such a family, every member brings home his pay and puts it in a common pot, and all basic needs are met. Anarchist-communism taught that all society should be "a great human family." People of the future must be encouraged from birth to think of society as their real family in the full sense of the term. Only under anarchist-communism could such a culture be encouraged. The anarchist-communist synthesis offered the best chance to achieve true equality while protecting society from the dangerous authoritarianism of Marx's unamended political system.³⁴

Cafiero also expressed concern over the increasing prominence of reformism, which he saw as the Trojan Horse inside the gates of the socialist citadel. He wanted everything to be held in common. Increasing numbers of self-styled socialists wanted to blur this point, or to eliminate it altogether by accepting the principle of private property. Cafiero stands out in the history of the Italian left as the first great nemesis of reform socialism. His vituperative reaction to reform socialism constitutes a point of departure for revolutionary politics in Italy.

The Clash with Costa

By 1880 Cafiero's old friend and comrade-in-arms Andrea Costa had come to embody the reformist socialist mentality. More than anyone else, Cafiero embodied the Italian revolutionary ideal. These two passionate personalities were bound to collide, and they did so with a rhe-

torical violence extraordinary even by Italian standards. The break between them came slowly. It began in the aftermath of the failed anarchist uprising of 1874.

Costa had worked closely with Bakunin and Cafiero in preparing this uprising. In the recriminatory aftermath of the defeat, Costa stood accused by many of his erstwhile admirers and followers of excessive optimism about the prospects for revolution in Italy. These criticisms stung him, and he began to reevaluate his political ideas. After his release from prison, in 1876, his calls for revolution became increasingly perfunctory. He no longer had the passion for conspiracy and armed insurrection that continued to excite Cafiero. Almost invariably now the two men found themselves on opposite sides of the issues that divided Italian anarchists into accommodating gradualists and intransigent revolutionaries. Costa, ever mindful of the humiliation of 1874, urged prudence, while Cafiero pushed for immediate armed action.

The truth about Costa's change of heart began to emerge in 1877, when he refused to support Cafiero's plan for an insurrection in the South. He objected to the scheme as an ill-conceived and ill-timed flight from reality. While prophetic in his analysis, Costa cut a poor figure in this episode. He hung back in the Romagna, hoping to take advantage of Cafiero's uprising if it proved successful. His ambiguous declaration in 1881, "It is true that I did not approve of the movement, but it is false to say that I did nothing to facilitate it," captures perfectly the cruel dilemma in which he found himself.³⁵ Without being able to admit it in public or even to himself, Costa had lost faith in the idea of revolution. Still strenuously resisting legalitarian socialism as treason to the cause, he had abandoned the values of his Bakuninist youth without yet finding replacements for them. After 1877 he continued to search for a third way between revolutionary and legalitarian socialism, but this endeavor led him into one contradiction and mealy-mouthed evasion after another. At last, in 1882, Costa fully and unambiguously embraced legalitarian socialism by running for parliament as a socialist deputy—the first to do so in Italy.

Long before Costa's momentous political campaign, Cafiero raised a cry against him. In 1880 Costa had founded the *Rivista Internazionale del Socialismo* and then, in the following year, the weekly *Avanti!* Costa used these publications as sounding boards for his rapidly maturing political plans, which he had begun to unveil to the public in the sum-

mer of 1879 with an open letter, "Agli amici di Romagna." Costa's maneuvering toward the center incensed Cafiero. To a friend, Francesco Pezzi, Cafiero wrote in November 1880 that he still believed in the revolution: "I am ready to enlist as a simple soldier without any other thought than to fight royal troops."³⁶ Capitalism could not be reformed, he insisted. It could only be destroyed if men wanted a social system based on human needs instead of profits for the exploiters.

Two weeks later Cafiero expressed the same sentiments in a letter to the anarchists of Florence. Once again he invoked the ideal of anarchist communism. Costa's idea, to have socialists join the bourgeois institution of parliament and to work with the government, he called "the plague of our revolutionary party." Cafiero vigorously denounced Costa's "minor and practical programs." By strengthening the status quo and putting off the day of revolution, such minimalist steps played directly into the hands of the bourgeoisie. Instead, Cafiero proposed immediate revolutionary action: "the first step on our road must be the destruction of the present order." Words had to mean something. Socialism meant revolution or it meant nothing. Costa's definition of the term made it a synonym for capitalism, and this made him an enemy of socialism.³⁷

A period of feverish literary activity began for Cafiero as he took it upon himself to expose Costa's reformism and the mortal danger it posed for Italian socialism. In December 1880 he published an article entitled "Action" in which he publicly challenged Costa. His rebuttal began with the following premise: to cooperate with bourgeois political institutions, as Costa now proposed to do, was to give up on socialism as a serious alternative to capitalism. There could be no way around this self-evident truth. Capitalism stood for competition and profit, socialism for cooperation and equality. These two concepts could never be fused, except rhetorically, and as a rhetorical device the legalitarian socialist attempt to fuse them had much to recommend it—as a screen for capitalism. Cafiero contended that if socialism was the real goal, then certain steps had to be taken and others avoided. Above all, getting in bed with capitalists had to be avoided. Another imperative was action: "It is, therefore, of action that we have need, of action, always of action. With action, one acquires at the same time theory and practice because it is action that generates ideas, and it is action, again, that spreads them throughout the world."³⁸

By action Cafiero did not mean sending socialist deputies to sit in parliament. What true revolutionary, he wondered, could ever get such an idea. “No, a thousand times no. We want nothing to do with the maneuvers of the bourgeoisie. We must not play the game of our oppressors unless we want to participate in their oppression.” He argued that revolution entailed violence against the status quo. For a genuine socialist revolution to come to pass, certain people would have to be killed. The capitalists and their lackeys would not exit the stage of history quietly. They would resist, and their resistance would have to be overcome. Costa once had understood these truths, but he had forgotten them. Cafiero gloried in the heritage of violent anarchism, and he urged revolutionaries not to shrink from using “the knife, the rifle, and dynamite.” Every action against the system, he claimed, promoted the revolution.

Cafiero implored his readers to go out into the streets and to start the revolution without delay. The capitalists had a plan, to subjugate the masses and to exploit them. The masses needed a plan of their own, one that involved the immediate implementation of revolutionary action: “My friends, if we wait to attack until the day we are completely prepared, we will never attack.” Only through revolutionary action could the masses learn about revolution. They had to throw themselves into the water in order to learn how to swim. “As gymnastics develop the strength of the muscles,” so did revolutionary action affect the political acumen of those who participated in it. At the same time, Cafiero stressed the importance of revolutionary leadership. Only a “very restricted minority” had a clear understanding of revolution, but he felt certain that the masses would respond to their avengers. These leaders had to be true to their calling, which in the present context meant avoiding the deception of parliamentary politics.³⁹

On Revolution

In Cafiero’s next essay, which stands out as his most original work, he continued to explore the theory and practice of revolutionary violence. The history of this essay reads like a detective story. In 1881 “Sulla Rivoluzione” appeared by installment in *La Révolution sociale*, a newspaper based in Saint-Cloud, France, and secretly subsidized by the police with the aim of inciting the anarchists to illegal action. The tur-

bid world of anarchist meetings and publications swarmed with government infiltrators. Cafiero had no knowledge of the actual situation on *La Révolution sociale*. He sent his article to its staff, and they began to publish it. After several installments had appeared, funding for the newspaper stopped, and it went out of existence. The unpublished portion of Cafiero's essay disappeared for ninety years.

A university student, Gian Carlo Maffei, discovered the missing work. While doing research for his thesis on the Italian anarchist community in Switzerland, he examined the Federal Archive in Berne, where the Confederation kept police records. There he found a folder entitled "Personal Dossier, Cafiero Carlo." The folder contained papers not seen since 1881, including the complete 155-page manuscript of "Sulla Rivoluzione." It was the historical researcher's dream come true.⁴⁰

Thanks to Maffei's find, we now know that the essay consisted of four parts, not three as previously assumed: "Revolution and the Natural Law," "Our Revolution," "Revolutionary Practice," and "Revolutionary Morale." The first two parts had been published in their entirety in *La Révolution sociale* and then republished by Gianni Bosio in *Rivoluzione per la rivoluzione* (1970). Portions of the third part had appeared in these same publications. In 1972 Maffei published the missing sections of part 3 and the hitherto unknown part 4.

Cafiero began the essay with a quotation from his *Compendio del "Capitale"*: "The revolution of the workers is the revolution for the revolution." In part 1, "Revolution and the Natural Law," he addressed the problem of revolutionary violence. Actually he saw such violence as a solution rather than a problem. Cafiero bluntly promised the bourgeoisie that they would be liquidated. Their fate, he wrote, had been sealed from the beginning of time. The natural law of revolution operated fatally throughout history, and now the time for the overthrow of capitalism had come. As Marx had cogently explained, out of capitalism's contradictions socialism would emerge. By developing capitalism to its uttermost limits, the tycoons of today were preparing "the necessary ground for our revolution." Cafiero, therefore, wished the capitalists good appetite: "eat and devour to satiety; because when you have eaten everything, it will fall to us to eat you." If they fattened themselves up they would have a better flavor: "And how hungry we are!"⁴¹

In part 2, "Our Revolution," Cafiero extolled proletarian violence

as the most exalted force in history: "Oh, revolution, sublime law of nature, law of life and of progress, law of justice and love, law of liberty and equality. Holy revolution, return to our midst; resume your course among the peoples, among them establish your definitive reign and your will be done." "Our Revolution," he continued, is the heir of all past revolutions and must derive its force and basic direction from them, against the social order, religion, the family, and property. "Down with authority!" he cried. "With the iron of their chains," he predicted, "the gladiators in their revolt will forge the sword of liberty: from the centuries-old chains of our servitude, we will produce the weapons of human emancipation." Then, after the final battle against capitalism, all would be well, and men would be able to live in concord and brotherhood. Without capitalists and proletarians, all men would be free and equal: "No longer will each be against all, and all against each." The full actualization of the principle of sociability would bring about the final stage of human history.⁴²

Maffei's publication in 1972 of the missing sections of "Rivoluzione" filled in a major gap in part 3, "Revolutionary Practice." Left out in the previously published part of this section was Cafiero's emphasis on the extreme danger posed by any state, even one supposedly controlled by the workers. Maffei thus restored the symmetry of Cafiero's original argument. Until 1972 it appeared that capitalism had been Cafiero's exclusive substantial concern in part 3, but in the newly added pages he expatiated on the manifold dangers of authoritarian socialism. He repeated Bakunin's dire pronouncements about the extreme likelihood that the state of the workers would be "a new and terrible monster." For the dictatorship of the proletariat—the only governing entity allowed in Marx's system—to have total political and economic power, "what new and monstrous bureaucratic mechanism would it not be necessary to create?" The leaders of such a state could not escape the corrupting effects of so much power, "and they will be new and even more terrible political oppressors and economic exploiters." Cafiero warned, as Bakunin had before him, that a fully realized dictatorship of the proletariat would be the end of human emancipation and liberty. Such dictators would destroy the cause of the revolution. They would make the capitalists and even the medieval nobles look benign by comparison. To avoid the corruption that power always causes, society had to become and to remain stateless.⁴³

Government existed for two purposes only: to protect powerful elites and to oppress the defenseless and disorganized multitude. Under anarchist socialism there would be no protected elites and no oppressed multitude. There would be a society of equals, with an abundance of material goods for everyone. All men would be able at last to develop themselves fully and freely: “to study, to live with nature, to admire the beautiful in works of art, to love.” Every kind of work would be of equal importance to society because each job would be useful and serve a true need. The allocation of enormous resources for the maintenance of the privileged and pampered lives of the rich introduced the social and economic distortions that anarchist communism alone could eliminate. Therefore, Cafiero concluded, “the principal end of our revolution must be to take away from man the means of inflicting useless and dangerous activity on humanity.”⁴⁴

None of the essay’s fourth and concluding section had appeared in *La Révolution sociale*. In this section, Cafiero made a passionate appeal for the propaganda of the deed. Everyone on the socialist left, he began, professed to believe in revolution, but how many seriously contemplated acting on that belief? Marx thrilled him, above all for the intellectual power and originality of *Capital*, but also for his stirring call to revolution. Cafiero saw very clearly the affinities between Marxist revolution and anarchism’s propaganda of the deed. The differences between these two concepts meant much less in practice than they did in theory. Marxism, unlike anarchism, hedged its call for revolutionary violence with an elaborate philosophical justification and a complex historical theory. In practice, however, the justification and the theory quickly receded into the background for Marxists when they became convinced of the existence of a revolutionary situation. At that point the differences between anarchist and communist revolutionary tactics diminished appreciably, and under capitalism what situation was not revolutionary? Cafiero thought that an honest reading of Marx would lead inescapably to the conclusion that communist revolutionaries had a permanent obligation to resist capitalism in every efficacious way. Bakunin had preached the same message. Cafiero did not see how Marxism differed from anarchism in its practical fundamentals as a revolutionary creed. By amalgamating them into one entity, Cafiero hoped to create the ultimate nemesis of capitalism.

Cafiero further insisted that anarchism and communism reinforced

each other on the great issue of left-wing politics in Italy at the close of the 1870s: reform socialism. Marx and Bakunin spoke with one voice against the moderates of the left, that is, those who “renounce revolution.” Cafiero defined moderation as the “limitation, reduction, [and] diminution” of socialism. The moderates, “with their minimum program,” had no intention of bringing socialism to the masses. They intended instead to protect the capitalist status quo by distracting the masses with symbolic gestures and meaningless reforms. Cafiero saw the capitalists as criminals who deserved nothing but expropriation and punishment. One could not enter into collaborative arrangements with those who had plundered, repressed, tortured, maimed, and killed the workers of the world. Cafiero concluded “Rivoluzione” with a rousing endorsement of Marxist and Bakuninist extremism: “To diminish, reduce, or limit our program, in a parliamentary sense, is to treat with the enemy, to fold one’s battle flag, to trick the people, and to renounce the revolution.”⁴⁵

Cafiero's Last Years

Cafiero had opposed Costa’s reformism from the day of its announcement, but until the summer of 1881 his attacks had not been bitterly personal. Then he sent a ferocious open letter, “To the Comrades of the Romagna,” published in *Il Grido del Popolo* on 21 July. The once great tribune of the Romagna had abandoned the cause of revolution for a “program of expedients and little reforms [*riformette*].” For the first time, he denounced Costa by name: “Yes, Costa is an apostate, a renegade of the revolutionary faith of the people.” Cafiero did not even give him credit for acting in good faith. Costa the careerist, he charged, had seen where power and political opportunity lay and had changed his beliefs accordingly. Such a traitor had no right to live, and Cafiero incited the faithful to inflict revolutionary justice on him. He signed his letter “In the anarchist revolution, yours for life and death.”⁴⁶

Cafiero’s threats against Costa coincided with a bleak period in his personal life. His general health had been in decline for some time. He lost weight and became exceedingly pale during the spring and summer of 1881. In June he suffered a nervous breakdown. Upon recovering, Cafiero journeyed to London, in September, hoping to meet

with Marx. The meeting did not take place because Marx had left the city in search of a cure for his own health problems. Cafiero stayed in London for the winter of 1881–1882. His illness grew worse. The mental part of it, which took the form of an acute persecution mania, especially alarmed his friends. He became so suspicious of people that by the end of his stay in London he would only talk to Malatesta. The two men would meet in the middle of Hyde Park and Cafiero would whisper confidences in Malatesta's ear. Later, at an anarchist conference, Cafiero surveyed the delegates and told Malatesta, "Can't you see? They are all spies."⁴⁷ Not long after this he made an unsuccessful suicide attempt.

After returning to Italy, Cafiero inexorably descended into madness. He drifted from city to city. On 8 February 1883 he left his room at an inn in Fiesole, near Florence, and began to wander the fields completely in the nude. Local peasants found him standing in a pool of icy water. By the time a doctor reached him, he was in convulsions. Authorities committed him to the asylum of San Bonifazio in Florence. He would never completely regain his mental balance.

In attempting to explain Cafiero's insanity, Peter Kropotkin—after Bakunin the major international leader of anarchism—claimed that Cafiero had been undone by Anna Kuliscioff's rejection of him in the winter of 1880–1881.⁴⁸ He had pursued this Russian Jewish beauty and star Marxist while her lover, Costa, served a jail sentence.⁴⁹ The fury of the falling out between these two men may have had much to do with their rivalry over Kuliscioff. Cafiero, however, did not have a history of passionate romantic involvements, and the record of his relationship with Kuliscioff is ambiguous. It is difficult to tell what transpired between them or how their relationship affected his psyche. Many other factors probably contributed to his final breakdown: the stress of repeated disappointment, failure, police surveillance, expulsions, interrogations, and imprisonment should not be underestimated.

Cafiero's long-absent wife, Olimpia, now reappeared and tried to help him. In 1886 she secured his transfer to a mental institution in Imola, where his physical health began to improve. He continued to inhabit a twilight world of intermittent mental lucidity. In November of 1887, however, the asylum authorities released him to his wife's care. The couple lived in Imola and then in Bologna. Cafiero's condition remained unstable as sharp bursts of crisis followed periods of

calm. In 1889 the couple moved to the family home in Barletta, and he seemed to get better. He responded to the familiar surroundings of his youth, but soon his wife had to commit him to another asylum, in Nocera Inferiore. While there, he developed intestinal tuberculosis and died on 17 July 1892 at the age of 45.

In his classic historical novel *Il diavolo al Pontelungo* (1927, *The Devil at Longbridge*), Riccardo Bacchelli (1891–1985) told the story of Bakunin and the Italian anarchists in the 1870s. Bacchelli, a political conservative, wrote the novel in the same antirevolutionary spirit that had animated Fyodor Dostoyevsky in *The Possessed* (1872) and Joseph Conrad in *The Secret Agent* (1907), two of the major novels in Western literature that deal with terrorism. He belonged to the traditionalist Ronda group of writers in the 1920s and espoused the values of Alessandro Manzoni's Christian humanism. Applying that standard of judgment to the anarchists, Bacchelli found them wanting in the extreme. Like Dostoyevsky and Conrad, he castigated the anarchists as delusional and ineffectual fanatics. At the outset of his book, Bacchelli declared: "It is necessary to say that this is the story of an error, and of an error that produced crimes and inglorious events." He portrayed Bakunin and company as men who "cannot learn. They would no longer be themselves if they could learn."⁵⁰

Despite Bacchelli's excoriation of the anarchists as a whole, his portrait of Cafiero is oddly appreciative. Of all the unreconstructed revolutionaries in the novel, Cafiero is the most humanly credible figure. Bacchelli does censure him for his fanaticism and in a flash-forward shows his madness and premature death to be a fitting end for the terrible choices he made in life. Yet he describes a Cafiero who possessed a "human nobility" that manifested itself in unstinting generosity to all who approached him.⁵¹ For Bacchelli he is much more admirable than Bakunin, who, as a character in the novel, has a large streak of perfidy and charlatanry in him.

If a conservative like Bacchelli could develop sympathy for Cafiero, the left could be counted on to do far more for him. The myth of Cafiero as the martyr of anarchist communism began to take hold while he still lived. Anarchist groups named themselves after him in Livorno, Ancona, Ravenna, San Remo, and New York. In anarchist

families it was common to give children the first name of “Cafiero.” His exploits and sacrifices inspired songs, sonnets, and paintings. In one of his last moments of lucidity, Cafiero intoned, “The principle is affirmed.”⁵² For those who drew inspiration from him, Cafiero had affirmed the principle of revolution. The Word had been made flesh in him, and the mendicant order of revolution in Italy had its first patron saint of the Marxist era.

Antonio Labriola: The Philosopher of Praxis

The proletariat cannot raise itself up without the whole superincumbent strata of official society being sprung into the air.

—Karl Marx, *The Communist Manifesto*

On 3 August 1892 Antonio Labriola, who always prided himself on his Neapolitan hardheadedness, wrote to Engels about his impressions of Cafiero's death. The University of Rome philosophy professor thought the anarchist leader a fool. Cafiero had died "like a dog" in the madhouse, having been stripped of an immense fortune by his "*comrades*."¹ Bakunin had been the worst of these false friends. He certainly had profited the most from the hapless Cafiero, but many others among "the living" had joined the cannibals' feast. Labriola blamed the anarchists for the demise of the old International, and he despised them all. The cause of revolution had been set back disastrously by this strange alliance of "professional scoundrels" like Bakunin and "idealists and madmen" like Cafiero who understood nothing of socialism. Labriola set himself the task of bringing a true understanding of socialism to the Italians, and this meant, he fervently believed, exposing them to the undefiled word of Marx.

Labriola was born in 1843 into a genteel but poor family in Montecassino, near Naples. His foremost biographer, Luigi Dal Pane, thought the family sprang from an ancient patrician lineage but could not say so for sure. Indeed, about Labriola's early years, Dal Pane offered few certainties. The father, Francesco Saverio Labriola, taught high school. When it came time for Antonio to go to the University of Naples at age 18, his family could not support him. Help came from Bertrando Spaventa (1817–1883), the university's most eminent philosophy professor. A teacher in Montecassino during the 1840s,

Spaventa had come to know Labriola's father. In 1861, the year Antonio began his university studies, Spaventa found a high school teaching position for Francesco Saverio in Naples, and the whole family moved there. The professor and his politician brother, Silvio (1822–1893), also managed to place the precociously brilliant Antonio in the prefecture of police. Money worries continued to haunt Antonio's father. In a December 1863 letter of appreciation to Silvio Spaventa, he lamented "the most meager fortunes" that obstructed his son's path.²

From the vantage point of a police station, Labriola for two years (1863–1865) saw the garish underside of Neapolitan life. Though he was placed in one of the less harrowing sections of the prefecture, this experience appalled the young scholar.³ The job served him well as a means to his end. He did acquire an excellent humanistic education, but his years in law enforcement made him impatient with speculative philosophy. He could only think about philosophy as a practical means of solving social problems.

Professor Spaventa, whose *Giornale Napoletano di Filosofia e Lettere* made him the cynosure of Hegelian philosophy in Italy, was the first great intellectual influence in Labriola's life. Labriola would always praise Spaventa as an exemplary teacher whose originality as a thinker had never received adequate recognition outside of Italy. Spaventa, steeped in Kant as well as Hegel, celebrated Hegelianism as the capstone of Western philosophy, and he sought to link Hegelian ideas to earlier traditions of Italian philosophy, notably those associated with Giordano Bruno, Tommaso Campanella, and Giambattista Vico. Italians, he argued, had conceived modern thought, which through the writings of Descartes, Spinoza, and Kant then had enriched the intellectual patrimony of all Europe. Through what Spaventa called the circulation of European thought, ideas originally advanced by Italians were returning to Italy, strengthened and refashioned, via Hegelianism. Spaventa, though a philosophical idealist, shared many of the practical political concerns of his brother, Silvio, himself a serious student of philosophy and, after unification, the leading theorist of the conservative Historic Right. They both embodied the patriotism of the Risorgimento and brought to Italian politics a Hegelian view of the state as the high-minded directive conscience of the nation.⁴ Professor Spaventa's philosophical ideas and civic concerns became Labriola's own.

In the first letter Labriola ever wrote to Engels, in April 1890, he fur-

nished a brief intellectual autobiography. He began by describing his involvement with the “Neapolitan reflowering of Hegelianism.” In subsequent letters to Engels, Labriola came back again and again to the University of Naples as his alma mater in the truest sense of the nourishing mother. He remembered his teachers with undiminished affection, above all Spaventa, who “wrote about the dialectic exquisitely” and whose mentorship made the life of the mind an utterly compelling reality. “I was born in that environment,” he told Engels, and it marked him for life. He would become a socialist “because of my (rigorously) Hegelian education.”⁵

Labriola took a long time coming to an embrace of socialism. Released at last from the onerous work of the prefecture, he began teaching literature at a Neapolitan high school. He hated teaching at this level but found the time to write and publish a prizewinning book, *Origine e natura delle passioni secondo l'Etica di Spinoza* (1867). The book gained him much recognition in the academic world and helped to prepare the way for his entry into university teaching. Labriola also had the advantage of an exceptionally happy marriage. In 1866 he married Rosalia Carolina de Spengler, a German woman of great intelligence and character who herself had been a teacher. She shared his intellectual labors as a full partner, and in his correspondence he never tired of praising her as his consolation in life. He had need of consolation. They lost their first child, and his own health was not good. Moreover, teaching high school had a demoralizing effect on him.⁶ He continued to try to write his way out of that job and into some kind of university teaching career. In 1869, at the age of 26, he published *La dottrina di Socrate secondo Senofonte, Platone ed Aristotele*, which won the Accademia di Scienze Morali e Politiche di Napoli prize. Now he began to receive offers to collaborate on various moderate liberal newspapers. A period of intense journalistic activity opened up for him.

The most important of his articles appeared in the *Nazione* of Florence in 1872. Addressing the recent surge of clerical influence in Neapolitan politics, Labriola claimed that the city's most progressive liberals—the “reds,” he called them—had contributed to this problem by their stupidly gratuitous insults to Catholic culture. To political maladroitness these liberals had added philosophical vacuity. Italian liberalism had proved to be an effective weapon against the perverse irra-

tionality of the Old Regime, but it had failed to produce an efficacious alternative, or what Labriola called “the beginnings of a new religious life in the country.” No replacement sense of community had emerged with the Risorgimento, which had succeeded only too well in destroying the traditional order. Labriola thought that this destruction could be viewed positively only if it were followed by something higher, finer, and nobler. Instead, life for the Neapolitan masses had not improved at all under a liberal administration. People continued to risk breaking their necks every time they set out on the city’s impassable streets. Filth and disease ravaged neighborhoods where the water supply remained inadequate twelve years after unification. The substandard schools still produced their annual harvests of ignorant and unprepared students. The scandal-enshrouded leaders of the new order, with their budget deficits and cost overruns, had succeeded only in bringing disgrace to liberalism. The people concluded, therefore, that “all those who have administered, administer, and will administer have been, are, and will be thoroughgoing scoundrels, thieves, and swindlers.” The introduction of liberalism had left Naples, Labriola wrote that same summer to Silvio Spaventa, “an inhospitable wasteland.”⁷

Labriola brought the sensibility of a political activist to his scholarly writing as well. Even his earliest books were not Hegelian treatises on philosophy in the standard academic sense of the term. Labriola, like his mentor Professor Spaventa, yearned to create a strong national culture, but the detritus of the ages would have to be swept away first. At no time in his adult life did Labriola ever veer from a philosophy of political engagement. Following his appointment to a professorship of moral philosophy and pedagogy at the University of Rome in 1874, he continued to think about his profession as an opportunity for service to the country. “I would have a great desire to write to you about philosophy,” he informed Spaventa in 1875, but necessity pressured him to focus on “more practical” matters.⁸ Indeed, the correspondence between the two men revolved around national and university politics.

From 1877 to 1891 Labriola headed an institute designed to improve Italian education, particularly teacher training, and much of his writing during these years dealt with pedagogical matters. The ideas of the philosopher and pedagogical theorist Johann Friedrich Herbart (1776–1841) about the formation of moral character as the supreme end of education strongly shaped Labriola’s work in this area and con-

tributed, as well, to his steadily evolving critique of liberal individualism as a philosophy unable to respond to the deepest ethical and communal needs of man. In 1875 he complained to Spaventa about the feebleness of the Italian state's efforts "to finish once and for all with the empty forms of liberty and to reestablish the seriousness of life."⁹

Labriola also found in Herbart an updated confirmation of Vico's theory about life as a series of man-made processes. Herbart thus illustrated Spaventa's theory of the European circulation of Italian thought while simultaneously cutting against the conservative Hegelian theory of pure idealism. He gave Labriola some Aristotelian ballast for the control of altitude in Hegel's flights of fancy to the higher realm of the Platonic ideal. Dal Pane cites Herbart as second in influence only to Spaventa in the shaping of Labriola's pre-Marxist thought.¹⁰ Both thinkers inspired him to think about the ethical and educative function of the state. He wrote *Della libertà morale* (1873) and *Scienza dello stato* (1880) under their inspiration.

Labriola made his greatest mark in the academic world as a classroom performer. He became famous in Italy as one of the outstanding academic orators of the day. Benedetto Croce, who did not actually take his courses but sat in on the lectures, described him as a magnificent public speaker with a brilliantly original mind.¹¹ With his thick mane of dark curly hair, handsome features, and torrential eloquence he embodied the ideal of the charismatic university don for his multitudinous admirers. Critics who thought him a grandstanding egomaniac bent on politicizing the students spoke against him, but he emerged from these controversies as the university's premier celebrity. Students followed him around Rome. Every evening between six and seven, he held forth at the Caffè Aragno, which long remained a national treasure for its elegant décor but today—in a permutation of the historical dialectic unimaginable to Labriola—is a fast-food restaurant.

Croce, who tended to despise university professors, immediately found himself drawn to Labriola's warm and engaging spirit. He had thought that such spirits could not exist in the academic world. It was as if a beautiful flower had sprung up in a garden drably overrun with weeds and nettles. Croce first encountered Labriola in 1884 at Silvio Spaventa's house in Rome, which was then a magnet for all the liberals who had become disillusioned with Italian politics during Agostino Depretis's years as prime minister, 1876–1887. He remem-

bered Labriola as a surpassingly witty, entertaining, and learned conversationalist who always had singular views. He marveled in particular at Labriola's deep knowledge of all things German, about which the professor "was like an evening news bulletin."¹² These favorable impressions grew stronger after Croce attended Labriola's lectures, and the two became lifelong friends. For Croce, every moment with Labriola was an investment in the life of the mind. Labriola lived for books and ideas, and he could not help enlightening all in his orbit who were capable of being enlightened. Croce, the famous autodidact who avoided the university world as the bane of the writer, honored Labriola as the maestro who had taught him to think critically.

The tone of Labriola's political commentary became increasingly caustic. He belonged to that post-Risorgimento generation of Italian intellectuals who viewed the new kingdom as a grievous disappointment, particularly when compared with the Mazzinian ideals that had inspired them as young men. Outrage over Italy's dismal failure to achieve the ideals of Mazzini led to severe repercussions in intellectual and political life. On the right, alienated artists and writers, such as Giosuè Carducci, began to drift toward reaction, inaugurating an anti-liberal tradition that would become part of fascism.¹³ On the left, Labriola represented another kind of antiliberal reaction. He, too, grew alienated from the status quo, but primarily because of the socio-economic plight of unemployed workers. For him these unfortunates illustrated the Hegelian critique of liberal society.

Labriola became involved as an activist with radical opposition groups in 1879. He tried the democratic left first, but found no idea worthy of the name in that quarter. It seemed to him that Italy's democrats took too much relish in anticlerical priest baiting, all the while ignoring the heart of Italy's problems: the socioeconomic power structure that controlled everything in its own particular interests. Labriola's study of history and his observation of contemporary Italian society made him think that only the most radical overhaul of the entire system would suffice. Searching for a genuinely radical theory and practice of politics, he discovered in Marx the fulfillment of Hegelianism. By 1880, as he informed Engels, his intellectual transformation was complete. Croce did not find Labriola's conversion to socialism surprising because in the conservatism of the Spaventa circle there "was much intellectual radicalism."¹⁴ As their disillusionment

with the post-Risorgimento order grew, some liberals began to find their way to both extremes in Italian politics.

Labriola spent the next ten years trying to figure out how to implement Marxism in Italy. Only in 1886 did he begin to speak openly in his lectures about socialism, but as he wrote to Engels, “the thing [*la cosa*] passed unobserved.”¹⁵ Three years later, though, university officials suspended him from teaching for two months because of his by then notorious left-wing views and involvements with working-class movements. His superiors continued to threaten him with suspension into the early 1890s.

In reconstructing Labriola’s intellectual transformation into a Marxist radical, Dal Pane made extensive use of the professor’s university lecture notes, which possessed “a vast importance for preparing the terrain of successive developments.”¹⁶ Labriola’s 1887–1888 course on the philosophy of history contained no direct references to Marx, but he did describe himself as a theoretical socialist. In the 1888–1889 academic year he gave a course on the French Revolution, to celebrate its centenary. Newspapers published accounts of Labriola’s spellbinding lectures for this course, and a throng of students attended them. Focusing on the role of the proletariat in the French Revolution and arguing that in contemporary times socialism constituted the authentic legacy of 1789, Labriola sparked angry polemics as never before.

From his study of the lecture notes for these courses, Dal Pane concluded that Labriola, as late as 1889, still had no systematic understanding of Marx. This conclusion finds support in Labriola’s own description of his intellectual life. To Engels he tried to convey the difficulties of being an aspiring Marxist in Italy. Labriola could read German, but he repeatedly complained about the scarcity of even the most basic Marxist texts in Italy. His letters to Engels contain numerous appeals for books and articles. Imparting his own hard-won knowledge about Marx to the students constituted another daunting problem. They gaped uncomprehendingly at his attempts to explain the materialistic theory of history. The students found the doctrines of *Capital* “too abstruse.” The lessons went better with *The Communist Manifesto*, a work Labriola described as “unsurpassed for density of thought in simplicity of form.”¹⁷ Nevertheless, the students struggled with formidable disadvantages in trying to understand Marxism: the

liberals among them lacked even the most basic vocabulary and conceptual framework for such an undertaking, and the radicals still had not gotten beyond Mazzini's mystical incantations to God and the People.

At the same time, Labriola entertained great expectations about the workers as the hope of socialism in Italy. On 20 June 1889 he gave a speech to a workingmen's group in Rome. He urged these manual workers to join forces with "workers of the mind." Together they could achieve social justice in Italy. Labriola described socialism as a philosophy deriving its deepest insights from the misery of the masses and as "*a new religion of civil equality*" for the oppressed victims of capitalism. Economic and political liberalism had produced the current exploitative order; socialism alone could replace it with "social cooperation for the common moral and material good."¹⁸ Professing at this point—before he had begun his systematic study of Marx—to hate violence, Labriola expressed the hope that the transition to socialism would involve only a peaceful progression from liberalism. At all events, however, the privileges of the capitalist elite, which he deemed even more odious and ruinous than those of Old Regime aristocrats, had to end. Labriola hailed the socialists as the new priests of the modern world who would translate the spent force of Christianity into a meaningful doctrine for all men and apply it to the here and now. Exposure to the full canon of Marx soon would make short work of these irenic sentiments in his thinking.

By 1890 Labriola had become an apostate to liberalism. That year he observed in a pamphlet how liberalism and socialism existed in a state of irreconcilable opposition to each other. Liberalism could be useful in a backward country like Italy for clearing away repressive, reactionary, and corrupt institutions, but the long-term interests of the proletariat could only be advanced by socialism. Indeed, the short-term advances that liberalism made possible sabotaged the long-term revolutionary goal of the proletariat. Parliaments universally had one aim: to adjust society to the needs of capital. In the process of making such adjustments, some liberal benefits incidentally would fall to the people. Nonetheless, the real purpose of liberalism was to improve the capitalist status quo, not to eliminate it. He, therefore, belittled parliament as an intrinsically bourgeois institution that "will disappear with the triumph of the proletariat." Liberal democracy sooner or later

would give way to social democracy. At that inevitable moment, even the most radical forms of liberalism would become completely antagonistic to the class interests of the proletariat. Marxism made it clear that the workers could depend on themselves alone, not on the “political manipulators” of parliament: “Between *bourgeois politics* and *socialism* (two distinct periods of history!), there is such a decisive break that no art of the politicians will be able to extract one thing from the other by the magic of legislative provisions.” The great danger for the proletariat lay in the eagerness of their current leaders to join with the bourgeoisie in making the reign of capital permanent by eliminating only the system’s worst features, leaving its essentials securely in place.¹⁹

Working-class politics would make no progress in Italy, Labriola assured Engels, until the country developed a serious Marxist culture. The situation there, he wrote, “requires a recall *to the true sources of socialist inspiration*.” Socialism had almost no presence in Italy: “The young people know only the positivists, who for me are the representatives of idiocy in the bourgeois manner.” Marxism alone could open the eyes of these young people to the real causes of the world’s suffering. At the moment, though, they stood helpless ideologically and, therefore, politically as well. “It is necessary,” he told Engels, “to fill in this lacuna.”²⁰

The absence of theoretical Marxism made the cause of Italy’s Socialist party hopeless from the start, Labriola reported to Engels. The party had come into being at a 14–15 August 1892 congress in Genoa, which Labriola called “a colossal fiasco.” What should have been the crowning event in Italian politics had passed into history as “a mess [*pasticcio*] Italian style, with the usual low comedies and farces, and with a good dose of bad faith.”²¹

Labriola said as much to Filippo Turati (1857–1932), the leader of the Socialist party. Labriola respected the younger man’s mind and talent. Turati had been trained as a lawyer and had written poetry and reviews for the cultural journals associated with the Scapigliatura literary movement. Celebrating the bohemian life, the *scapigliati* rejected middle-class morality and were the angry young men of the day. In this circle of Milan-based writers, Turati had discovered the great passion of his life, politics. Influenced by the utopian communal theories of Benoit Malon (1841–1893), who emphasized the importance of

religious, philosophical, political, and aesthetic factors in the class struggle, Turati had written *Il delitto e la questione sociale* (Crime and the Social Question, 1883).²²

At about the same time, Turati had fallen in love. Following a tempestuous breakup with Andrea Costa, Anna Michailovna Kuliscioff (1854–1925) had turned to Turati for solace. From Kuliscioff, Turati had received an education in Marxism. Prolonged exposure to the anarchists, however, had transformed Kuliscioff's politics. She now abhorred violence. Although Kuliscioff and Turati thought of themselves as Marxists, they paid little attention as a practical matter to the revolutionary side of Marxism and gravitated toward thinkers like Malon who emphasized the cultural preparation necessary for the replacement of capitalism by socialism. Revolution would long remain part of their vocabulary, but the seriously revolutionary socialists, like Labriola, would come to think of them as adversaries.

The relationship between Turati and Labriola had begun with maximum cordiality on both sides, however, and had deepened for a time into affectionate friendship. They exchanged epistolary kisses and expressions of strong admiration for each other. On 31 October 1890 Labriola wrote, "After a month I return the kiss to you." All went well until they began to discuss Marx. They stood on opposite sides of the great divide in socialism: revolution. Turati, while countenancing revolution in theory, favored legal methods in practice, whereas Labriola stood for revolution and thought the bourgeoisie good only for the gallows: "I will not have the good luck to hang them myself, but I do not in the least want to contribute to postponing the hanging."²³

Labriola long tried to win Turati over to the revolutionary position. His strategy involved a steady diet of praise for Turati personally, coupled with an increasingly brutal attack on Italian socialists en masse, as if to say we intelligent ones must stick together against the dumb herd. Labriola felt confident, he wrote on 17 August 1891, that Turati, as "a man of broad and unselfish views," fully understood the deeper issues in Italian socialism. He continued with this approach to Turati for nearly a year, right up to the mid-August 1892 founding congress of the Socialist party in Genoa. Just three weeks before that congress Labriola wrote to him: "I very much believe that we are in intellectual agreement, just as I believe that you see everything clearly and that you dissimulate your impressions, partly out of sentimental illusion, partly

out of ambition.” At the congress, however, Turati showed a willingness to compromise with socialists of all kinds, including non-Marxists, and Labriola lost patience with him.²⁴

Labriola all but terminated his correspondence with Turati after the August 1892 Socialist congress. For the failure of this congress to produce a serious Marxist party, Labriola blamed a number of factors, but in his correspondence with Engels he singled out Turati for some harsh criticism. He had thought Turati was “honest and selfless, but of a spirit and temperament exclusively Italian, and worse Milanese.” Turati had no better idea than to form a socialist party that would be “a clique of politicians.” On the eve of the congress, Labriola had lamented to Engels that the forces of “possibilism” or practicality were gaining the upper hand in the Italian socialist movement. Turati, “the most cultivated” of all the big-tent socialists who argued in favor of a watered-down minimalist Marxism as the best way for the movement to prosper, had rejected all of Labriola’s appeals for Marxist clarity and rigor.²⁵

After the Genoa congress, Labriola sent Engels a summary of his fruitless two-year struggle to bring Turati to an understanding of Marxism as a science of revolution. Turati tried “to embrace everything and to please everyone,” Labriola began. Labriola had exhorted him “to take a path, to decide, to adopt a doctrine or a line of conduct.” It had all been for nothing, and Labriola refused even to attend the Genoa congress because Turati had told him that for political reasons it would be impossible to adopt a clear program. Turati had conceded that Labriola was right in theory, but the practical need of not alienating any of socialism’s varied constituencies had to take precedence. The subsequent history of Italian socialism would be a series of thematic variations on the conflict between these two men, as well as on the one a decade earlier between Costa and Cafiero.²⁶

Labriola’s acute disappointment with Turati and Italian socialism as a whole induced him to melancholy reflection about the flaws in the Italian national character that had made such a pathetic excuse for a socialist movement possible. His gloomy state of mind originated partly from rapidly worsening health problems but also from a deeply held suspicion, in the manner of Italy’s most penetrating social commentators from Machiavelli and Guicciardini to the present, that the country suffered from fatal liabilities. “Man cannot remove himself from the influence of that which surrounds him,” he told Engels, “and

this blessed Italian life is too ugly." He habitually deferred to Engels on Marxist theory, but at the same time played the role of Vergil to Engels's Dante as his guide through the sad halls of Hell, which is how Labriola thought about Italian society. He had mentioned the "Italian comedy" in an August 1891 letter and made of it a recurrent image in his correspondence with Engels. In everything Italian there is always "the great comedy," he informed Engels on 6 March 1892. As for the country's leaders, "the political clowns [he used the English word] always have something with which to entertain us in this country where the tearful comedy and the laughable tragedy flourish."²⁷

Comedy in the Dantesque sense worked as literature, but failed abysmally as a social system. The cultural depravity of the Italians pervaded and ruined everything that they undertook. The country existed in a state of indescribable anarchy about which, Labriola assured Engels, no German even could begin to formulate an adequate idea. The political life of the country suffered from unique forms of paralysis and decay. Public immorality went further and deeper in Italy than elsewhere. Influence and cronyism controlled everything through "the banks, the railroads, the shipping companies . . . the criminal organizations [*le camorre*] and the Masons." Every healthy impulse, including the yearning for socialism, fell victim to "this universal plague of corruption." Labriola summed up the Italian situation in a one-word sentence: "Ruin [*sfacelo*]."²⁸

The bank scandals of 1892–1893 left Labriola more depressed than ever about the prospects of a truly civilized society in Italy. He fell ill at this time and wrote to Engels, "I am terribly tired and need absolute repose." He added that thirteen years earlier he had been gravely ill with dyspepsia and anemia, followed by acute forms of dizziness and nervous exhaustion. Now 50, he felt old, and symptoms of his previous illness were reappearing. The bank scandals had aggravated his physical condition. He felt a wave of "bitter disillusionment" crashing down on him. The country's institutions all had failed: the monarchy, the parliament, and the magistracy most of all. "The sad condition of this hapless country" should have made Italy a laboratory of serious socialist activity, but her socialists came from the same central casting office that had sent the rest of the players for the Italian comedy.²⁹

How Labriola envied Engels. Upon congratulating him for a May Day anniversary celebration in London of *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, Labriola asked to be permitted to combine his felici-

tations with “a little envy, an unavoidable sentiment in anyone who feels himself weak and impotent.” Labriola repeatedly expressed in these letters rapt admiration for Engels as the supreme living revolutionary thinker in Europe. “Your name,” Labriola had written him on 30 March 1891, “inspires reverence in the hearts of all Italian revolutionaries.”³⁰

Labriola’s envy arose in part as well from Engels’s natural advantages as a German. The Labriola-Engels correspondence provides a concrete example of the argument made by David Blackbourn and Geoff Eley in *The Peculiarities of German History* that “by and large, those who talked before 1945 about a German *Sonderweg* were more often inclined to endow this [special path] with a positive value.” Certainly Labriola thought positively about Wilhelmine Germany. He himself had married a German, “a Pomeranian no less of the most pure nobility,” and his choice of a marriage partner had not been adventitious. He deeply admired all things German. “Here among us,” he confided to Engels, “one has an almost superstitious appreciation for the science and worth of the Germans.” After finally meeting Engels, in August 1893 at a congress of the Second International in Zurich, Labriola described himself as “simply a German lost in Italy.”³¹

Engels thereafter became Labriola’s “excellent and dear” friend. The correspondence took on a simultaneously affectionate and theoretical character. Deeply immersed in the book he was writing about Marxism and in his 1894–1895 university course on the principles of the materialistic doctrine in history, Labriola turned to the “most dear” Engels—then editing volume 3 of *Capital* (1894)—for instruction on the real origin and meaning of Marx’s dialectical method, “that is, the form of thought that conceives things not as they are . . . but as they will become.” To carry out his enterprise, Labriola explained to Engels on 27 June 1895, “I need your encouragement and, if necessary, your *correction*.” In this same letter Labriola expressed the hope that Engels’s long silence “did not have an unpleasant cause.” It did, and on 5 August 1895 Engels died in London.³²

Labriola’s Essays

Engels did live long enough to read part 1 of the first essay in Labriola’s major work of Marxist theory, *Saggi intorno alla concezione materialistica della storia* (Essays on the Materialistic Conception of

History), which he described as “rigorously Marxist.”³³ Labriola published the essay, “In memoria del Manifesto dei Comunisti,” in Georges Sorel’s *Devenir Social*, a nearly brand-new review. The year was 1895. As Croce soon afterwards observed, “In memoria” was the real beginning of an original Marxist intellectual movement in Italy.

The essay grew out of the lecture material for Labriola’s course on the philosophy of history. He contended that ancient and Renaissance historians had described the class struggle, but Marx had analyzed it scientifically. According to Labriola, by offering a completely original conception of history *The Communist Manifesto* had ushered in a new age for the proletariat, one in which their conscious class awareness as the oppressed victims of society had become a force in history. Moreover, Marx’s 1848 appeal to the workers of the world “discovers the genesis, determines the evolution, and predicts the final effect” of the class struggle.³⁴

Labriola then sought to clarify why this final effect inevitably had to be revolution, exactly as Marx had foretold. Only a violent upheaval, he began, could put an end to capitalism. All other strategies simply would lead to an accommodation with the bourgeois status quo, which even in its relatively benign modern form continued to function as nothing more than a system of legal exploitation, robbery, slavery, and murder. Labriola thought that the struggle against capitalism would be long and arduous, but signs flashed everywhere in the modern world that age-old systems of exploitation were coming under attack: “These fifty years [since the publication of *The Communist Manifesto*] were ever-growing proof of the ever-growing rebellion of the producing forces against the forms of production.”³⁵ Marxism alone—“our doctrine,” as Labriola repeatedly called it—had the capacity to furnish the attackers with a winning battle plan based on an intelligent understanding of history and current economics.

Labriola foreshadowed the ideas of Antonio Gramsci about praxis, or the effective linking of philosophical theory and political practice. He thought that new insights into the Marxist project could only be derived from the actual political experiences of the proletariat “because in this group alone exists the revolutionary force that breaks, crushes, stirs up and dissolves the present social order and creates in it, little by little, new conditions; or, to be more exact, with the very fact of its rising [*il suo moto*] it demonstrates that the new conditions are being created, established, and developed.”³⁶ Avoiding dogmatism in this

way, Marxist theory would be continuously updated and enriched. Praxis, thus, was not merely another name for practice, but a way of describing the process of mediation between theory and practice.

Labriola illustrated his analysis of *The Communist Manifesto* with numerous comments about his native land. Italy had begun to modernize itself and offered a fascinatingly complex example of class struggle between residues of the old feudal order and the forces of modernization: “A modern state [exists] in an almost exclusively agricultural society, and largely backward agriculture at that—which creates a sentiment of universal uneasiness.” The post-Risorgimento state understood that it had to modernize the country, but, at the same time, it needed the old guard to maintain order during the transition to modernity. This arrangement created a terrible confusion, resulting in “the incoherence and the inconsistency of the parties” and the general chaos of the country’s political life. Yet the economic transformation of agriculture under capitalism had begun to undermine the bastion of conservatism in the South. Even the peasants, “the presumed custodians of conservatism,” were stirring from their centuries-long slumber.³⁷

Tragically for the Italians, at a critical moment in their history they had been denied the treasures of Marx’s insights. Labriola offered his essay as an authentic Marxist antidote to the false socialism purveyed by Italy’s Socialist party. This party stood not for Marxism, which it neither knew about nor comprehended, but for a bizarre mixture of democratic, humanitarian, and romantic sentiments that revealed a great deal about the middle-class background of Italian socialists. The bourgeois leaders of the party lacked the life experiences and the theoretical expertise to understand the needs of the proletariat or to do anything about them. Socialism had come to Italy not from the pure spring of Marxist thought but from the brackish backwater of Bakuninism, an ideology Labriola castigated for its “confused and incoherent” character.³⁸ The baleful influence of Bakuninism had corrupted and ruined the promise of socialism in Italy, and the Socialist party had become the last refuge of the worst elements of the petty bourgeoisie, of *déclassés* of the most pathetic kind, and of revolutionaries “by instinct [*per impulso*]” who completely misunderstood the nature, purposes, and processes of revolution.

In the following year Labriola wrote part 2 of the *Saggi*, “Del

materialismo storico: Dilucidazione preliminare,” in which he attempted to set forth the fundamental principles of Marxist historical analysis. His university lecture notes formed the basis for this second essay as well. Labriola praised Marx, above all, for identifying “the real subjects” of history and for imbuing the discipline with a wholly new critical awareness of class. By insisting upon the paramount role of the economic substructure in determining the culture and consciousness of society, Marx “objectifies and I would say almost naturalizes the explanation of the historical processes.” All previous historians had been held back by erroneous theories, “which with the force of prejudice for centuries veiled the effective truth.”³⁹

Yet Labriola cautioned against interpreting Marxism in a crudely reductionist way: “In our doctrine one is not dealing with retranslating into economic categories of all the complicated manifestations of history, but only with explaining every historical fact *in the ultimate instance* (Engels) *by means of the economic substructure* (Marx).” In other words, the cultural superstructure played an important role in the unfolding of history. A nation’s social psychology, or “the specific consciousness of men in given social conditions,” came into being initially as a result of economic forces, but over time the intellectual, religious, political, educational, and legal consequences of the substructure generated consequences of their own. Thus, history had to be viewed as the sum of a complex ensemble of substructural and superstructural factors. Labriola did not want to deny that Marxism ultimately was a deterministic philosophy, but its determinism had to be understood in a complex way: if “every fact of history finds its origin in the conditions of the economic substructure [it is also true] that every fact of history is preceded, accompanied, and followed by determined forms of consciousness.”⁴⁰

Very much in the manner of Georg Lukács and Antonio Gramsci, Labriola stressed the importance of ideas and intellectuals in elevating the class consciousness of the proletariat. Until the workers became aware of the reasons for their plight, the revolution could not occur: “As revolutionary doctrine it is above all in the intellectual consciousness of the present proletarian movement, according to our belief, that the advent of communism is at length prepared.” He cited the French Revolution as the classic illustration of how “ideas germinate in the terrain of social necessity” and how “moral forces are produced

and developed in particular conditions.”⁴¹ The French Revolution had been prepared by the philosophes, and Labriola thought that every revolution required just this kind of cultural preparation.

Examining the current scene in Europe, Labriola called upon Marxist intellectuals to emulate the philosophes in spirit. Today’s intellectual workers had the task of illuminating the realities of class oppression under capitalism so that factory workers and peasants could free themselves through revolution and create a communist society. Intellectuals could best further the revolution by exposing the contradictions of the capitalist system and by demystifying its institutions, above all the state and the law. By revealing the hidden connections between class interest and politics, Marxism made it possible for the workers to understand the ways in which the state and the law functioned as pillars of the capitalist establishment. These institutions had come into being and continued to exist for one purpose only: to make the exploitative status quo secure. Presaging Gramsci’s hegemony theory, Labriola offered a pithy definition of politics: “to apply a force, or a system of forces, to an ensemble of resistances.”⁴² To have meaning, political history had to be connected to deeper forces in culture and, ultimately, to the deepest force of all: economics.

Labriola hailed communism as the only solution to the problem of capitalist domination, from which every social problem ultimately stemmed. With communism would end all forms of inequality “that are not the natural ones of sex, age, temperament, and capacity.” In place of dysfunctional capitalism, a communist order of intelligence, science, and justice would make its epochal appearance. Communism would render the state unnecessary because with capitalist greed no longer ruining the world and degrading nine-tenths of humanity for the obscene enrichment of the other tenth, society would run smoothly on its own. The rich would no longer need the state because they would no longer exist. Similarly, a communist society would have no use for the elaborate chicanery of the capitalist legal system because the bourgeois bloodsuckers who alone benefited from it would have disappeared in the proletarian revolution. Communism would create a new culture and improved social institutions, thereby eliminating the class antagonisms that had made the contemporary world a bloody battleground. The relentless struggle for resources had pushed mankind into an endless cycle of violence: “War without and

war within. Incessant struggle between the nations and incessant struggle between the elements of individual nations.”⁴³

In 1897 the third and final installment of the *Saggi* appeared, “Discorrendo di socialismo e di filosofia,” which took the form of a series of letters to Sorel, written from 20 April to 15 September of that year.⁴⁴ In them Labriola responded to criticisms of the first two essays and continued his analysis of why Italian socialism had developed such maddeningly peculiar traits. What else could be expected, he asked, from such a maddeningly peculiar country. By some perverse historical law, from the utopia of Mazzini’s imaginings about what unification would bring to the Italians had come the dystopia of post-Risorgimento Italy. The country had become “the promised land of decadents, of megalomaniacs, of empty-headed critics [*critici a vuoto*] and of those who are skeptical out of boredom and the desire to cut a figure [*per fastidio e per posa*].”⁴⁵ Socialism followed in this train. As with everything in Italy, national character accounted for the abnormality of Italian socialism. Some healthy and humanly decent elements could be found in the movement, but as a political force they existed in a state of suspended animation. Marxism alone could liberate them from the thrall of ignorance and futility into which sundry mountebanks had led the Socialist party. Labriola understood Marxism not merely as a method of studying history, but as the most complete way of understanding and shaping the world.

Benedetto Croce, who had helped Labriola edit the *Saggi*, described its impact on his generation.⁴⁶ The first essay he “read and reread,” and it had the effect of a “revelation that opened itself to my anxious spirit.”⁴⁷ He immediately began to read Marx, and it took him two years of assiduous study to get through the major works. Labriola’s second essay made an even deeper impression on Croce, and on the intellectual world as a whole. With its publication Labriola became recognized as Italy’s foremost Marxist and known all over the world.⁴⁸

In public statements symptomatic of a Europe-wide revisionist critique of Marxist theory as a formula for the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism, Croce praised the brilliance of Marx but faulted his doctrine for its politically partisan character. Although Labriola lashed out at Croce in a private letter for being a mere “man of literature and an intellectual epicurean,” their personal relationship survived this and other disputes. They respected each other too much to end their

friendship. In 1896 a loan from Croce saved Labriola from financial ruin, and such an act of human solidarity counted more to him than agreement on points of philosophy. Moreover, he genuinely admired Croce's mind and declared, "I do not subordinate my friendship toward people, and above all toward you, to my judgment of their opinions." He expansively professed to enjoy reading contrary views.⁴⁹

Letters continued to fly back and forth between the two men, with Labriola holding steadfastly to his Marxist faith. In one such letter of October 1898 Labriola exclaimed, "Even though I have not yet had any apostolic investiture from a St. Peter, I believe myself to be duty-bound to defend as I can and as long as I can socialism and its world view." In this and in numerous other letters of the same period, he upbraided Croce for his "intellectualistic" approach to Marxism. Croce wondered how else an intellectual was supposed to approach theories. He had learned to think critically from Labriola and believed such methods had to be applied not only to the ideas of one's adversaries but, equally, to one's own ideas. For Labriola such a politically neutral principle could only lead to reaction in one or another of its many variations.⁵⁰

Karl Kautsky and Eduard Bernstein

In the desolating aftermath of Engels' death and Croce's disappointing embrace of revisionism on his way to outright liberalism, Labriola turned to Karl Kautsky (1854–1938) as a kindred spirit. Kautsky had received instruction in Marxism directly from Engels, and upon the latter's death in 1895 emerged as the major spokesman of the movement. A fluent and indefatigable writer and editor, he produced a vast outpouring of articles and books. His work epitomized a highly Darwinized version of Marxism that appealed to the tastes of a positivist age. Among Kautsky's books from this period, *The Economic Doctrines of Karl Marx* (1887) most completely reflects the kind of intellectual work that he performed on behalf of the Marxist movement. A book of popularization, it presented Marx as an intellectual genius who had solved all the major economic and historical questions about capitalism. It remained for Marx's followers only to implement the master's laws of historical and economic development. Although Kautsky

emphasized the importance of these laws in attaining socialism, he continued to identify himself as a revolutionary Marxist.

Kautsky and Labriola found themselves in complete agreement on the supreme issue of the day for Marxists: revisionism versus revolution. This issue had been in the air for a long time, but in 1899 it assumed a momentous aspect. The publication that year of *Evolutionary Socialism* by Eduard Bernstein (1850–1932) pitted socialists against one another in every European country. No book written by a Marxist between *Capital* and Lenin's *State and Revolution* (1917) had a greater impact on European Marxism. *Evolutionary Socialism* bears the same relation to Marxism that Luther's ninety-five theses on the church door in Wittenberg do to Christianity.

To understand the reasons for the tremendous uproar that this book caused in the world of European socialism, it is only necessary to cite Bernstein's major conclusion: the Marxist revolutionary project was radically misconceived. As a consideration preliminary to this conclusion, Bernstein held it as a law of human nature that "every nation, every class, and every group united by theory or interest has its own cant."⁵¹ He meant that men, in whatever mass to which they belong, lack the critical capacity in all things having to do with their own traditions and belief systems. Bernstein thought that a certain amount of cant was inevitable and even normal in any group, but a serious problem arose when its members took their rhetoric of self-indulgence seriously as objective truth, placing it beyond criticism. Socialists, he charged, had deceived themselves by just this kind of semantic sleight of hand on the question of revolution. To Bernstein the present-day liberal and democratic society contained much good. From the premises of the existing order, socialism could evolve and, indeed, was evolving. Socialist cant still called for the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism, but the reality of socialism had no need for this early relic of Marxism. Bernstein denounced the dictatorship of the proletariat as a thoroughly obnoxious and "atavistic" concept, and he called for the creation of a socialism that would be in complete harmony with the democratic tendency of the age.

Revolutionary Marxists of every stripe condemned Bernstein's book, which went through nine editions in ten years and was translated into all the major European languages. Bernstein became the

human symbol of right-wing socialism. The centrists and the left-wing socialists, who as yet did not perceive the full extent of the chasm dividing them, united against him. All these antagonists believed in the proletarian revolution as the inviolable core of Marx's system. If Bernstein were right, Marx would be wrong, they reasoned.

In Italy, Labriola led the attack against *Evolutionary Socialism*. The book shocked him deeply, and he complained bitterly to Croce about its "trashiness [*sgorbio*]." Through Kautsky, Labriola earlier had entered into a correspondence with Bernstein. His credentials included a title that had made a strong impression on Labriola: he was Engels's literary executor. In the third essay of the *Saggi*, "Discorrendo di socialismo e di filosofia," Labriola extravagantly praised Bernstein. In a later edition of the book, he added this footnote: "In writing thus . . . I would not have dreamed that, in a short time, the Bernstein I praised . . . would have been presented to the world as the major exemplar of *reformism*, by the instigators of Marxism's crisis."⁵²

Labriola and Kautsky lamented Bernstein's disgrace. Bernstein had not created the so-called crisis of communism, but he had brought it fully into the open, Labriola thought. Sorel, "a great intrigant," had been stirring up trouble in the Marxist world for years, Labriola complained to Kautsky.⁵³ Croce, too, had abandoned the cause, sowing confusion as he went. Indeed, Italian socialism had been in a ferment over revisionism from the very inception of the movement. Conceptually, therefore, Bernstein's book presented no novelties.

Yet for Labriola *Evolutionary Socialism* possessed a huge historical significance because of Bernstein's place in the apostolic succession to Engels. He had been the James of the apostles, Engels's favorite and personal choice to administer his papers. Labriola fumed to Kautsky that "the name of Bernstein is everywhere, now that the Italian press does nothing but publish articles 'on the crisis,' 'on the agony,' and 'on the schism of socialism.'" Of course, Bernstein was right to insist that Marxism should be examined critically: "*But I firmly believe also that this correction must be carried out prudently and in an opportune way within the party itself and within the limits of Marxism as a progressive doctrine.*" By disrupting Marxism and undermining the morale of Marxists, Bernstein had made himself an "indecent figure."⁵⁴

Labriola reported to Kautsky that *Evolutionary Socialism* had had wholly pernicious effects on Italian socialism. Quite predictably, all the

soft-headed humanitarians who led the Italian Socialist party were lifting their glasses in celebration of Bernstein's book. He singled out Turati as a prime example of the problems the book had created in Italy. Turati's doctrinally eclectic journal, *Critica Sociale*, had become a "useless" showcase for every erroneous belief on the anti-Marxist left. Turati and Bernstein, therefore, were meant for each other. Labriola's assessment of their relationship proved to be substantially accurate, but not completely so, at least not right away.

A leader during Milan's bloody May Days of 1898 when nearly one hundred people died and more than five hundred suffered injury in a government crackdown on working-class protest, Turati emerged from prison the following year with the controversy over Bernstein in full cry. *Evolutionary Socialism* cannot be said to have shaped Turati's politics, but the book did compel him to think more coherently about his long-evolving reformist ideas: the celebration of democracy, the rejection of revolutionary violence, and the recognition of the merit in liberal political institutions. For years Turati had been on the horns of a dilemma that he did not recognize. Averse by nature to violence, Turati continued to think of himself as a Marxist. He had committed himself to reformism, but at the same time clung to the idea of revolution as a necessary part of the Marxist tradition. As he had put it in an 1894 article in *Critica Sociale*, "our party fundamentally is as revolutionary as it is evolutionary." Along with many other moderate socialists of the day, he conflated reformism and revolution, seeing no contradiction between them at all. For this moderate interpretation of Marxism, Turati claimed to find ample support in the articles that Engels published in *Critica Sociale* toward the end of his life.⁵⁵

In the long term, *Evolutionary Socialism* accelerated the reformist trend in Turati's thinking, but in the short term he continued to insist that, in addition to reform, revolution would be necessary. Jean Jaurès, the moderate French socialist leader, and Kautsky thought the same thing. They all argued for a combined reformist-revolutionary strategy on the grounds that Marxism meant nothing and became indistinguishable from liberal democracy if the principle of revolution was denied.⁵⁶ As the years passed, Kautsky, Jaurès, and Turati would adopt Bernstein's reformist position. Nevertheless, at the time of the furor over *Evolutionary Socialism*, they all criticized the book for going too far in its revision of Marx.

Labriola staked out the most extreme position in the Bernstein controversy. His review of *Evolutionary Socialism* appeared as an open letter in *Mouvement Socialiste* on 1 May 1899. The editor of the journal, Hubert Lagardelle, had asked Labriola for his opinion of the book. Labriola called it a very disappointing performance and predicted that “around the ideas and the name of Bernstein no new current and no new movement will be born.” Bernstein had tried to do too much in the book: “It has the defect of being too encyclopedic.” To attempt a global revision of Marxism could only result in a superficial critique, and Bernstein had not gone beyond the standard litany of reformist criticisms that had been circulating in Europe for years. “I believe,” he concluded, “that socialism is always, and everywhere, polluted by purely radical, reformist elements of an uncertain and only approximately revolutionary nature.” Apart from the staggering blow he felt upon learning who had written this farrago—the great dashed hope of European socialism, Bernstein himself—Labriola thought the book had no intellectual significance at all.⁵⁷

Labriola predicted that Italian reformism, now buttressed by the enormous international prestige of Bernstein, would become openly what it always had been in carefully concealed fact, a prop for the capitalist order. Jaurès’s four-part review of *Evolutionary Socialism*, which Turati published in *Critica Sociale*, called attention to the open secret in the official response of so-called moderate socialists to Bernstein’s ideas. Jaurès’s criticism was rather innocuous, his agreement quite substantial, particularly on the subject of cooperation between the classes. “One must not fear the multiplicity of encounters and contacts between the proletarian class . . . and other classes,” he wrote.⁵⁸ Jaurès claimed to want revolution, but not “eternal hatred” between the classes. Labriola dismissed this kind of reasoning as humanitarian mush and completely at odds with the Marxist tradition. He wanted the workers to remain outside the capitalist system as its permanent adversaries and make ready for the inevitable revolution that alone could usher in socialism. To him, gradualism meant nothing more than the cooptation of the workers by capitalism.

Labriola did not complain alone about Turati. Many of Turati’s closest friends and allies in the party, notably Leonida Bissolati and Costantino Lazzari, criticized him for being too flexible toward the status quo. Turati defended himself. Only the most doctrinaire fanatic,

he insisted, could believe that all bourgeois parties were the same. In fact, great differences existed among them, and, in his judgment, socialists had to make a politically realistic decision about each one on a case-by-case basis. Here Turati reflected the spirit if not the letter of Bernsteinism, and in the great events that would define socialism in the twentieth century the differences between the two, which were never very substantial, would vanish.

Labriola continued to write to the still revolutionary-sounding Kautsky as his last hope. It would take the Bolshevik Revolution for Kautsky to reach the unambiguous conclusion, in *The Dictatorship of the Proletariat* (1918) and *Terrorism and Communism: A Contribution to the Natural History of Revolution* (1920), that democracy and socialism must mean the same thing. Labriola, meanwhile, felt increasingly isolated in Italy, ever “the land of anomalies.” Italian socialism could not avoid undergoing distortions in such a land: “There is great ignorance, a great levity, an absolute lack of the sentiment of responsibility, and everybody mounts the stage as if to recite a comedy.”⁵⁹ The country seemed to him to have no taste for Marx at all, and the fickleness of the Italians disturbed him as they fluttered from one ideological fad to another. Each year brought forth a new guru, a different panacea, a fresh slogan—all destined to become the next year’s discarded clichés. Labriola had placed great hope in the *Saggi*, but, despite the book’s critical success it had not dispelled the darkness that enveloped Italian socialism. His reformist adversaries on the socialist left, reinforced by the perfidious Bernstein, had triumphed over him.

Worsening health compounded Labriola’s despair. By 1902 his letters to Kautsky dealt as much with his medical condition as with the political issues he loved to discuss. In December of that year he lamented that he could no longer give “the great oratorical lectures (that were my fame and my joy!).” By then he could only teach seminars and meet with small groups of students. The throat cancer that afflicted him grew steadily worse in 1903. On 12 September he wrote to Kautsky that he could only give “the worst news” about himself. He could hardly speak anymore and pronounced “each word with great effort.” For a man of words, who always had reveled in teaching and arguing, this was worse than a death sentence, and he considered himself “lost [*un uomo perduto*].”⁶⁰

Nevertheless, Labriola continued to write to Kautsky about Italian

politics. In his last letters, he raged against Turati's revisionist reformism. Bernstein had applied the last touches of corruption to Turati's already badly decomposed socialism. Imagine a socialist, Labriola wrote, who "denies the class struggle, invokes the harmony of class interests, and says that socialists no longer consider the state an enemy."⁶¹ Italy not only had such socialists; they led the Socialist party. Worse, not a single socialist group or circle in Italy protested Turati's profanations. Rudderless and pilotless, Italian socialism was headed toward shipwreck.

Labriola could do nothing now and suffered through the last year of his life in torment. "I am not getting at all better, and indeed I have resigned myself not to get better," he informed Kautsky on 28 September 1903. At the end of that year he took immense delight in the news that the *Saggi* would appear in English translation, but he did not live to see it in book form. From his deathbed in Rome's Ospedale Tedesco, he wrote to Kautsky, "Tomorrow my fate will be decided." He had not eaten for a month, and even liquids would go down only with the greatest difficulty. "I have become a skeleton," he forlornly announced. To Kautsky's wife, Luise, he wrote at the last, "I would like to write to Karl about politics and science, but I am an unlucky man [*un disgraziato*]." Labriola died on 2 February 1904, at 60 years of age.⁶²

In the obituary notice that he wrote for Labriola, Turati praised the fallen philosopher both for his charisma as a teacher and for his brilliance as a thinker. Turati recalled Labriola's famous 1889 course on the French Revolution, which had introduced the theory of historical materialism to university audiences in Italy. It could not be said that Labriola had been the first in Italy to speak of Marx, but he had elevated Italian Marxism by placing the discussion of it on an exalted theoretical plane. The *Saggi* remained the outstanding Italian contribution to socialist thought. With Labriola's death "the most critically learned spirit that ever honored Italian socialism" had departed the scene.⁶³

Turati did hint at the difficulties that he had experienced with Labriola. An intellectual of the purest kind, Labriola could never be a party man. He yearned for complete intellectual integrity in politics. To the unalloyed idealist, compromise always means betrayal, and

Labriola was such a man. He had a clear vision of the way the world should be ordered but felt powerless to impose his will. “The omissions and inevitable incoherencies” of politics made his soul miserable. Labriola expressed disdain above all for the clichéd humanitarian thinking of the socialists—“that socialist parroting of traditional formulas and phrases, against which his reactions were biting and implacable.”

Labriola and Turati had added definition to the antipodes of Italian socialism, following Cafiero and Costa. In theory, Labriola and Turati clashed over the timing, near or far, of the revolutionary project, but the major political issue that divided them was imperialism. This issue had a long prehistory in Italian politics, but it surged to the foreground in the months leading up to the country’s military defeat at Adua in 1896. Convinced that a fatal conflict existed between the country’s imperialist policy in East Africa and the need for social reform at home, Turati called for a withdrawal of the army from Ethiopia. From the beginning, he had taken a stand in his *Critica Sociale* articles and editorials against Italian imperialism as a monstrous crime against the peoples of Africa. He would have none of the “white man’s burden” arguments that European imperialists used long before Rudyard Kipling composed his famous poem. In 1891 Turati denounced imperialism as robbery “placed at the service of the bourgeois mercantile spirit.”⁶⁴ He certainly would have agreed with J. A. Hobson, who in his classic 1902 indictment of imperialism declared it to be a money-making scheme promoted by “certain well-organized business interests [which] are able to outweigh the weak, diffused interest of the community.”⁶⁵ Turati would hold fast to this anti-imperialist position to the end of his life. Ethical issues apart, he thought it simply idiotic that a country whose people suffered from pellagra, illiteracy, and poverty on a massive scale would squander precious resources in Africa.

Labriola took a Marxist view of imperialism. According to him, the Marxist position did not admit of humanitarian clichés as guides for political policy. Instead, Marxism called upon its followers to understand that a historical dialectic, bringing mankind ever closer to socialism, was at work in the world. Before worldwide socialism could be achieved, capitalism first would have to be brought to all nations and peoples. Labriola interpreted imperialism in just this light, as Marx

himself had done in celebrating the British Empire for the indirect service it performed on behalf of socialism by clearing away reactionary precapitalist cultures from backward parts of the world. Labriola thought that no Marxist who had read and understood what Marx actually had written could oppose imperialism. Naturally, he expected that the Italian Socialist party would be in the vanguard of anti-imperialist sentiment, along with all the other beautiful pacifist souls of the higher bourgeoisie who understood nothing about Marxism or the realities of international relations. Contrary to the pious beliefs of such individuals, the affairs of the world did not resemble a carefully controlled seminar on ethics. Real forces, in the form of the laws of history discovered by Marx and the perceived interests of the great powers, would always overcome "noble intentions," Labriola wrote to Teodoro Moneta, the leader of the International Peace Society.⁶⁶

Labriola pointed to Marxism with pride as the highest form of realism in the study of history and in the understanding of politics. In an interview he gave to a journalist in April 1902, he dwelled on the importance of political realism. "The interests of socialists," he warned, "cannot be opposed to national interests." Indeed, socialists had to identify and to promote all the genuine interests of the nation. He considered imperialism such an interest for Italy. The Italians could not absent themselves from the natural expansion of European capitalism: "*Italy cannot by its own will sequester itself from history.*" He described imperialism as a natural progression that had been sanctioned by Marx as the means by which "the universal circulation of modern life" would be promoted.⁶⁷

Italy, Labriola thought, had an even more urgent reason than the other countries of Europe for embracing imperialism: the need for living space. He told the interviewer that Italy should have "a population policy." Demographic realities made it impossible for Italy to rest content with the status quo. Labriola regarded the huge exodus of Italian emigrants as an irreparable loss for the nation and an infallible sign of the country's "inferiority in the world." To stem this tide of outflowing humanity, "the state now had to employ military and public financial forces in an undertaking that could then channel for centuries the elementary demographic forces of the Italian nation." In Africa, "*the new Italy*" could be created.⁶⁸ The Nationalist movement, just beginning its

fateful odyssey in right-wing Italian politics, took appreciative notice of Labriola's views about "*the necessity of Italy's colonial expansion, even by force.*"⁶⁹ Thus, long before fascism, Labriola's unqualified support for imperialism revealed the capacity of Marxism to make strange political bedfellows in Italy.

Arturo Labriola: The Revolutionary Betrayed

The preservation of a Marxist vocabulary by people who have become completely estranged from the thought of Marx constitutes a great misfortune for socialism.

—Georges Sorel, *Reflections on Violence*

Arturo Labriola, no relation to Antonio Labriola, was born in 1873 and later remembered his boyhood in Naples with a mixture of pride and disgust. In his memoirs, *Spiegazioni a me stesso* (Explanations to Myself), he paid loving tribute to his artisan father, a tortoiseshell engraver, who had taught him about the honor of craftsmanship and the fulfillment that comes from important work skillfully and conscientiously done. Immersed in his craft, however, the elder Labriola had no head for business and was “exploited by everybody.”¹ The family knew real privation during Arturo’s youth.

Economic difficulties at home gave Labriola an empathic understanding of the social misery that engulfed Naples. The Labriolas were not the poorest of the poor, but young Arturo became acutely aware of the conditions that the social-activist writers known as the *meridionalisti* had exposed during the years of his childhood. He came to political consciousness amidst “the great material . . . and moral miseries of Naples, a city full of beggars, ragamuffins, criminals, and prostitutes.” Such a dismaying environment was an incitement to revolution, and Labriola could not remember being anything but a revolutionary. How could one be a conservative “in that state of affairs,” he asked in his memoirs.²

By the age of 14, Labriola had gravitated toward the most militant political group then active in Naples, the radical Mazzinians. Although

the Neapolitan left continued to venerate Bakunin and to celebrate the magical years of his residence in the city, the political influence of anarchism had all but vanished. Everywhere in Italy the movement was in retreat. Socialism had replaced it in the North as the dominant force on the left. In the South, however, the Socialists encountered resistance on the left, particularly from the Mazzinians.

In Naples, the Mazzinians continued to be strong, if crisis-ridden, during the late 1880s when Labriola came to political consciousness. Two factions vied for control of the movement. A moderate faction proposed a political alliance with the democratic Radical party. The left-wing Mazzinians, however, wanted to update the philosophy of their founder in the light of socialism and to join forces with the Socialists. The Mazzinians held a congress in Naples from 20 to 24 June 1889 and debated the issues that divided them. Speaking for the left wing, Enrico De Marinis called for a reconciliation between Mazzini and Marx. This speech made an indelible impression on Labriola, who later declared that he had never had any interest in theoretical purity.³ The real issue in Labriola's mind concerned the overthrow of the egregious social system that had enslaved the South. To accomplish that end, he welcomed any weapon that came to hand. Anarchism, socialism, Mazzinianism, and radicalism all belonged to the same family of parties and movements because they all stood in opposition to the status quo.

Labriola began to attend courses at the University of Naples in 1890. He studied law there, though without much profit. In his memoirs he described the university as "a waste of time and a school of ignorance." The law faculty he dismissed as "a real object of derision." Most of the professors did not teach and turned over those responsibilities to adjuncts. Labriola thought that it would have been worse if the professors had taught. One of them, he complained, did not know Italian and spoke in dialect. Fifty years later this hapless academic remained for Labriola the human symbol of the University of Naples.⁴

Only one of Labriola's teachers, Giovanni Bovio (1837–1903), then a lecturer on the philosophy of law and a deputy in parliament, inspired him. A flaming anticlerical and independent, Bovio sat with the democratic republicans on the extreme left. He played an important political and intellectual role in the efforts to unite Socialists, Radicals, and Mazzinians into an effective political force. He wrote numerous

political articles for a broad range of left-wing newspapers, particularly in Naples. At the same time he also published scholarly works. In his major academic book, *Corso di scienza politica* (1877), he advanced a theory of universal history that had as its end a rational, well-ordered society.

Labriola praised Bovio as his salvation at the University of Naples. He routinely skipped classes in order to read in the library but made an exception for Bovio's lectures. He called Bovio "a great humanist and a peerless lecturer." He had never heard such eloquence, and Bovio combined mastery of language with personal probity and a passion for social justice. Bovio validated and expanded Labriola's radical worldview, which he described in *Spiegazioni a me stesso* as essentially positivist. The young man could imagine no more revolutionary development than a systematic application of scientific standards to Neapolitan society. Roberto Ardigò, the author Labriola most appreciated during his university years, presided as the reigning figure of Italian positivism.

Labriola discovered Marxism at the University of Naples, not with the help of his teachers, but in the course of his extracurricular reading. Marx seemed to him to fit easily into positivist culture and to be an extension of it into the world of politics. *The Communist Manifesto*, with its theory about the economic causes of social problems, dazzled him. By comparison, anarchist literature seemed vague, sentimental, and superficial. Indeed, no thinker on the left could match Marx's rigor as a researcher and an analyst of concrete social problems. "Like a starving man," Labriola devoured all of Marx's major writings. He found Cafiero's compendium of *Capital* a useful guide to the masterpiece itself. Marx was the supreme writer of Labriola's youth. From Marx he obtained "not only information and ideas, but more important, his method of going beyond appearances and the habit of looking for deeper connections."⁵

Labriola immediately began to apply Marxist categories of analysis to the problem of the South. While still a university student, he contributed articles on the Southern Question to Turati's *Critica Sociale*. In one such article he provided a Marxist analysis of contemporary Italian politics, centering on the then-prime minister, Francesco Crispi. He quoted and cited Marx repeatedly in his explanation of why the country found itself in chaos, most notably at that moment in the

fields and mines of Sicily, where sensational peasant and worker violence had been taking place. What Villari and the other *meridionalisti* merely described, Marxist theory fully explained. The economic structure of the country, resting on a shaky foundation of halting northern industrialism and backward southern agriculture, largely accounted for the peculiar features of Italian politics. In keeping with all capitalist systems, the working class everywhere in Italy had fallen victim to the possessing classes: "The bourgeois state is exclusively centralizing and reactionary; it is a powerful war machine against the working class."⁶

The South, however, had suffered more than the North under capitalism. Even the North could not yet be called fully modern; it was only in the process of being modernized. The South, meanwhile, had yet to emerge from the Middle Ages. The patriarchal culture of the South reflected the region's underlying economic realities. The shocking and widening disjunction between North and South had to be understood in the structural terms that determined all superstructural developments, including politics. Crispi, a Sicilian, created the illusion that the South counted for more than it actually did in national affairs. In fact, he represented not the South but the Italian status quo that exploited the South, a process brutally symbolized by the recent hanging and shooting of "the poor martyrs in the depths of the Sicilian mines."

Labriola completed his degree in 1895 "without infamy or honors." He did well on his thesis, which dealt with the eighteenth-century economist François Quesnay, but wanted nothing more to do with the academic world. All through his university career, Labriola had been active in left-wing student groups. The police had begun compiling a dossier on him in 1892, and he had suffered suspension from the school for a year because of his radical activities. Upon graduating, he wanted to continue in politics as a left-wing activist. The thought of launching a career in the normal sense of the term did not occur to him. He had a cause instead, the crusade to transform Italy into a decent country. Years later he reflected on the state of mind that he and his university friends had inhabited: "Idealistically we lived in this ideal." Socialism became the means toward a grand end, of "bringing into being an egalitarian society of free men, associated in spontaneously federated autonomous communities."⁷

The first essay in Antonio Labriola's *Saggi* appeared the year Arturo Labriola finished his university studies. The two Labriolas soon

clashed over the proper way to interpret Marx, and in his memoirs Arturo showed no sign of having forgiven earlier slights. Antonio had condescendingly dubbed Arturo “Labriolino” (little Labriola) and declared that his Marxism amounted to nothing more than a low-grade form of populism. Antonio’s general attitude toward the younger man can be found in a letter he wrote to Croce: “Italian socialism must be very stupid to present Arturo as a great man.”⁸ Arturo responded by minimizing the theoretical significance of the *Saggi*. He triumphantly pointed out how little notice the Germans had taken of the book. They had not even bothered to translate it into German, and the reviews in Germany had raised questions about its originality and importance. Nevertheless, Arturo conceded that the book did create an uproar in Italy. Everyone on the left read the *Saggi*, and it unquestionably focused Italians’ attention on Marx as never before.

Meanwhile, the country continued its slide into chaos. The disastrous defeat of the Italian army at Adua in 1896 compounded the consternation that had greeted the violent disturbances in Sicily and the banking scandals in Rome earlier in the decade. Labriola and his friends continued to promote revolution in Naples. His file at police headquarters grew thicker. Then, in 1898, the tragic violence in Milan set off a chain reaction of disturbances up and down the peninsula. Labriola played a leading role in the commotion that swept Naples, and to avoid arrest he had to leave the country.

Vilfredo Pareto

Already a well-known writer, the 25-year-old Labriola first made his way to Switzerland, where he stayed briefly with Vilfredo Pareto (1848–1923) and worked as a research assistant for him. Pareto, a professor of political economy at the University of Lausanne and an avowed liberal, contributed frequently in these years to *Critica Sociale*. Turati defended his editorial decision to publish this antisocialist’s work by describing Pareto as a worthy adversary whose views merited consideration even in a socialist journal. In the pages of *Critica Sociale*, Pareto attacked the socialist belief that Italy’s ills stemmed from capitalism. He countered: “We free traders do not deny that the capitalist system brings with it some evils, but it seems to us that the systems now being proposed as substitutes would bring greater evils.” Liberalism could not be said to

result in “the greatest good,” but in “the lesser evil.” Every social and economic arrangement throughout history, Pareto insisted, had functioned in the service of elites, variously defined and selected, at the expense of the majority. Socialism would not change this immutable historical law.⁹

Writing as a liberal, Pareto contended that what we call in history the progressive liberation of the masses had taken place only because of the discovery that their freedom resulted in increased wealth for society and, in particular, “greater profits for the elites.” He predicted that once they achieved power the socialists would be corrupted by it, as every governing class always was, but liberals least of all because their theory of limited government saved them from the follies brought on by utopianism. Socialism Pareto thought a beautiful dream in which the nobly naive, with a touching if fruitless idealism, would contentedly wander. Socialist idealism was a wonderful thing, but it ignored the real motives by which men lived. At least the motives of the capitalists existed in the open and corresponded to human nature as it was, always had been, and always would be. In his rejoinder to Pareto, Turati regretted that so much intelligence and ingenuity had been wasted on an argument of the most remorseless cynicism.

Labriola found Pareto’s antisocialism much less intellectually respectable than did Turati, who for many years continued to publish articles by him. In 1896 Pareto’s *Cours d’économie politique* had appeared. When Labriola worked for him he was writing *Les Systèmes socialistes*, which would be published in 1902 to an ecstatic reception by antisocialists in Italy. The right-wing Nationalist movement, in particular, joyfully welcomed Pareto’s arguments in favor of the elitist theory that the strong dominate and exploit the weak no matter what the political system of a country might be. Labriola did some of the research, as well as some translation work, for this seminal antisocialist book.¹⁰

The portrait of Pareto in *Spiegazioni a me stesso* is mainly unflattering. Labriola did express appreciation for the job Pareto gave him. Pareto, the son of a marquis and very wealthy, often hosted dinners for Lausanne’s upper crust, and Labriola enjoyed the stimulating conversation at these gatherings. He also found Pareto’s well-stocked library a delightful place in which to work. Yet he quickly came to resent the patrician professor’s “rancorous antisocialism.” Their increasingly difficult relationship ended when the assassination of Empress Elizabeth

in Geneva by an Italian anarchist, Luigi Luccheni, sparked a police crackdown on all left-wingers residing in Switzerland. “Without heroism,” Labriola complained, Pareto counseled him to flee the country at once.¹¹

Georges Sorel

For the next two years Labriola lived in Paris, a period he described in his memoirs as “the decisive experience of my life.”¹² There he met Georges Sorel, whose ideas fertilized his own. Sorel, trained as a civil engineer, became interested in social and economic issues at the age of 40 and in 1892 retired from his civil service post to devote himself entirely to writing. He discovered Marxism in 1893 and for approximately the next dozen years wrote voluminously on all the movement’s major debates. Sorel also founded or helped to launch some important socialist journals in these years, notably *L’Ere Nouvelle*, *Le Devenir Social*, and *Le Mouvement Socialiste*. He wrote for Italian and German reviews as well. Like Antonio Labriola, whose work he assiduously promoted in France, Sorel thought of himself as a Marxist purist. Both men opposed the reformists. They soon parted company, however, over what it meant to be a Marxist purist. The older Labriola wanted a Marxism based on a literal fidelity to the canonical works of the founder. Sorel advocated instead a Marxist essentialism; he wanted to know what Marx’s essential idea was, and how it should be applied in practical political terms.

Known today mainly for the notorious *Reflections on Violence* (1908), a hymn of praise for the revolutionary Marxist tradition, Sorel came to the attention of Arturo Labriola initially through “L’Avenir socialiste des syndicats.” This short essay appeared in the March-April 1898 issue of *Humanité Nouvelle* and created an immediate sensation. Sorel began with an appeal for the left to return to the spirit of Marx. He cited Turati’s *Critica Sociale* as a leading example of how far the European left had strayed from genuine Marxism.¹³ The problem was Europe-wide, however, and it had come about because of the control exercised by middle-class intellectuals over all the socialist parties. The intellectuals had “professional interests, not general class interests,” and a proletarian revolution was not what they wanted at all. For such a revolution to occur, the workers would have to take charge of their own

destiny. "People outside of the productive corporation" could have no understanding of the world of work and the workers' need for a revolution.¹⁴

Sorel raised a question in "L'Avenir socialiste des syndicats" that would concern him for the next several years: how could "the chaotic mass of the proletariat" be transformed into "a class for itself?" He thought that the act of resisting the bourgeoisie would be the starting point for this process. In their unions, he predicted, the workers would develop the political techniques and acquire the moral insights necessary to win the class struggle. Morality and a scrupulous observance of ethics mattered to him a great deal. At this point in his complex ideological development, Sorel gave no hint of the fiery images of *Reflections on Violence* for which, almost exclusively, the world remembers him today. He adopted a very different tone in this 1898 essay: "I do not think that the social revolution could resemble a scene from the apocalypse," provided that the proletariat's moral development preceded its political takeover. Initially sympathetic to Bernstein, he wrote "L'Avenir socialiste des syndicats" partly in a reformist vein: "It is in the bosom of capitalist society that not only the new productive forces, but also the relation of a new social order—what can be called the moral forces of the future—should develop." He thought that socialists legitimately could work for reform measures in society to make the lives of the workers less harsh.¹⁵

Unlike Bernstein, though, Sorel wanted revolution. Yet in 1898 he argued that the individual moral dimension of revolution would matter the most in the end. Unfortunately, he fretted, socialist thinkers had not distinguished themselves as moral philosophers. Indeed, "we often see Marx's disciples showing astonishing carelessness whenever a question of morality arises." As a rule, they felt uncomfortable discussing moral questions and preferred to reduce everything to economics. Sorel warned that "it would be criminal to encourage a social revolution which would result in imperiling what little morality exists." He came very close in this essay to reducing the social question to a matter of morality: "The economic transformation cannot be realized if the worker has not acquired a superior level of moral culture." The union of the workers had to function as "*a mechanism capable of guaranteeing the development of morality.*" He cited such discrete problems as alcoholism and spousal abuse as the kind of character issues with which the

union—"one of the strongest pedagogical institutions that can exist"—could help its members.¹⁶

Revolutionary syndicalism came into being as a distinctive ideology with "L'Avenir socialiste des syndicats."¹⁷ Labriola discussed the essay with Sorel, but at the time it had only a limited impact on his thinking. Sorel's specific recommendations about labor unions and factory worker solidarity did not have much to do with the socioeconomic realities of Naples, which was still mired in a preindustrial stage of development. In contrast, Sorel's mantra-like invocation of Marx and his appeal for a return to authentic Marxism did move Labriola. Roberto Michels had Labriola uppermost in mind when he noted the enormous importance of Sorel in turn-of-the-century Italy. Sorel's writings, Michels observed, "were read, overread [*straletti*], translated, and commented upon by a brilliant group of writers."¹⁸

Without imitating Sorel precisely, Labriola—who remembered him admiringly in his memoirs—followed the general direction, in Michels's phrase, of "the new course" announced in "L'Avenir socialiste des syndicats." More than a disciple, he could better be called a critical student of Sorel. Labriola used Sorel's ideas selectively, on the basis of what would be of practical value in Naples. The appalling problems of the South framed Labriola's thinking in 1898, and ideas interested him to the extent that they could be applied in a practical way to that region's terrible social situation. Hence the pathos of his statement in *Spiegazioni a me stesso*: "To begin really from the beginning, it is necessary to take into account that I am a Neapolitan."¹⁹

Return to Italy

Labriola returned to Naples in 1900 aflame with the Sorelian ideas he thought useful. A general amnesty allowed him to resume a life that had been interrupted by the events of 1898. He came back, however, a changed man. His Marxist radicalism given a sharper focus by Sorel, Labriola now identified himself wholly with the cause of revolution. In 1899 he had published *La teoria del valore di C. Marx: Studio sul Libro III del Capitale* (Marx's Theory of Value: A Study of Volume 3 of *Capital*), but for him this was no mere academic or theoretical exercise, any more than his encounter with Sorelianism would be. He had a specific set of social problems in mind for which Marxism promised solutions.

Prodded by Sorel, Labriola now thought of Turati as an unconscionable trimmer, the Italian Jaurès. *Turatismo* became for him a synonym for every form of left-wing accommodation with the status quo, including sympathy for the monarchy. In his memoirs he condemned the Turati circle for “their implicitly monarchist position,” and in a historical account of these years, *Storia di dieci anni, 1899–1909* (1910), he made the dangers posed by the monarchy the central point of his interpretation. Umberto I had aspired to be the Kaiser of Italy, and Labriola cried shame at the “indescribable spectacle” of Turati’s expression of condolence after the king’s assassination in 1900. More than anyone else Turati stood between Italian socialism and revolutionary Marxism. Naples, as always, abounded with radical intellectuals, and Labriola found numerous like-minded allies.²⁰

After two years in Naples, Labriola moved to Milan, where he founded and directed an antireformist newspaper, *Avanguardia Socialista*. Sorel’s work continued to be very important to him, even more so now that he lived in the industrial North. From 21 June to 22 November 1903, *Avanguardia Socialista* carried a translation of “L’Avenir socialiste des syndicats.” Labriola also adhered to a Sorelian editorial line on the question of general strikes, the first of which occurred in Italy the following year, though with disappointing results. Looking back on this period in his memoirs, Labriola noted that “in the ‘idea’ of the general strike” Sorel had concentrated all the significance of revolutionary syndicalism.²¹

In the first few years of the new century, Enrico Ferri (1856–1929) led the left-wing anti-Turati opposition within the Socialist party, and Labriola joined forces with him for a while. Ferri and Turati had been classmates at the University of Bologna. After graduation Ferri had rapidly established himself as a successful lawyer and university professor. His 1892 book, *Socialismo e criminalità*, established his reputation as one of the leading socialist intellectuals of the day. Contemporaries praised him as a magnificent orator, and he looked the part as well. Roberto Michels, who saw Ferri in action on numerous occasions at Socialist congresses, described him as a splendid physical specimen: “His physique lends itself, in the most perfect way, to the fulfillment of [the speaker’s function]. The extreme beauty of the man, the magnificent head of curly hair, the penetrating gaze, the aquiline nose, the portentous voice with its warm and insinuating timbre are equally all

coefficients [leading] directly to spectacular success in the law, in the university, and with the people.” Such were Ferri’s skills as a speaker, Michels explained with an edge of malice, that he could make the most elementary points seem earth-shaking in their importance.²²

At the party’s Rome congress in 1900, Ferri and Turati had argued against each other. Ferri stood with the maximalists who wanted the party to emphasize the exploitative character of the capitalist system. Capitalism, they insisted, meant misery and oppression for the workers. The existing establishment ratified “the predominance of the monopolizers of social and natural wealth over the working class.” Public power had to be conquered “in order to transform it from an instrument of oppression to an instrument for the economic and political expropriation of the dominant class.”²³

Turati and his *Critica Sociale* allies took the lead in speaking on behalf of the minimalist program, a more flexible strategy for the class struggle. The minimalists thought that the proletariat needed to be educated in the responsibility of political and economic administration before it could take power. To be sure, the capitalists were exploiters, but, rather than trying to overturn the system at once, the minimalists advocated reforming its worst abuses and making life under capitalism more tolerable for the workers until socialism realistically could be inaugurated. The immediate goal of the Socialist party, according to the minimalists, should be to elevate “the moral and economic condition of the proletariat.”²⁴ Turati and the other minimalists had very specific issues in mind: universal suffrage, complete freedom of thought, the abandonment of imperialism, a laic state, the protection of women and children in the workplace, the improvement of labor conditions for all, medical insurance, old-age pensions, a just distribution of agricultural lands to the peasants, compulsory education, improvement in public hygiene, and the reduction of military spending.

The delegates at the 1900 congress voted in favor of both the maximalist and the minimalist programs. They thought that the two programs could coexist in harmony. The maximalist program contained for them “the supreme finality of the party” whereas the minimalist program dealt with the means to that end.²⁵ In fact, minimalism and maximalism would never be in harmony. Labriola quite rightly criticized the idea that the Socialist party could be both minimalist and

maximalist at the same time. He believed that the two factions in the party would always be incompatible on the only point of importance to serious Marxists: revolution. According to him, any program that diminished the revolutionary ardor of the proletariat could not be supported by a Marxist, and reformism could only result in just such a diminishment.

Labriola and Ferri led the attack against Turati at the party's 1902 congress in Imola, but they were beaten back. By then Labriola had begun to lose faith in Ferri as an ally. Labriola faulted him, above all, for his ignorance of Marxism. Ferri, a student of Roberto Ardigò and Cesare Lombroso, came from a positivist background. In politics, he had been a member of the Radical party before joining the Socialists. His ideas about revolution lacked the kind of theoretical grounding that Labriola had acquired from Sorel. By the 1904 party congress in Bologna, Labriola had emerged as the major socialist spokesman for the revolutionary cause.

Labriola posed a far more serious threat to Turati's position in the party than Ferri had. Turati had been able to dispose of Ferri by pointing to the lack of serious theoretical or practical content in his maximalist proposals. After the Imola congress, Turati accused Ferri of using revolution only as a rhetorical device: "We ask, what is a [political] *tendency* that, at the moment of truth, abdicates, melts away, eclipses itself, hides itself in the cellar, tacitly renounces itself?"²⁶ Ferri, the editor of *Avanti!* from 1903 to 1908, merely posed at being a revolutionary, Turati charged. Stirring phrases and crowd-pleasing gestures were fine, but what did they mean in practical political terms for the Socialist party? Ferri did not have a plausible answer to this question, and Turati neutralized him politically with ease. Labriola represented a threat of a different order of magnitude. He did have such an answer for Turati, and it came straight from Marxism or, rather, from Sorel's interpretation of Marxism.

At the Bologna congress, Turati and Labriola confronted each other in a duel by speeches. Turati spoke first, at the afternoon session of 10 April 1904. He immediately drew attention to "the two souls of the assembly." The reformist soul yearned for democracy and progress as the only secure way to bring about the socialist revolution of society. Turati thus continued to believe in the compatibility of the maximalist and minimalist programs that had been adopted at the 1902 Imola

congress. He condemned the syndicalists for repeating the anarchists' hoary error of wanting to reduce socialism to nothing but its revolutionary soul. Turati challenged the syndicalists to show how their unceasing appeals for the revolutionary overthrow of society differed from anarchism. He denounced their strategy as base, stupid, and dangerous. Anarchist and syndicalist ravings distracted serious socialists from the hard practical work they had to do in "this still medieval Italy." They had to work for democracy and "above all to elevate the tenor of life and the intelligence of these populations."²⁷

The syndicalists appealed to the worst qualities of the Italian people, their love of theatrical flourishes and addiction to rhetorical violence: "We live in a country in which the sentiment of rebellion, at least verbally, is enormously widespread, a country of esthetes, of sentimentalists, of artists, where there is this aestheticism of the phrase and gesture."²⁸ Turati told the party delegates that a population as impulsive and illiterate as the Italians must not be stimulated to violence. The syndicalists, misusing selected quotations from Marx, lacked all sense of the enormous damage they were doing to the cause of socialism.

Turati pointed to the history of the party's congresses to illustrate his argument about the weakness of the Italian national character. Socialist delegates, he recalled, historically had fallen asleep whenever a speaker talked about the duties of the proletariat or their need for discipline, education, and moral training. Let someone start humming the "International," however, and how quickly the atmosphere changed to one of raucous cheering for the people in arms. These gratifying emotional displays, welling up from the depths of Italy's injured national psyche, had nothing whatsoever to do with the actual business of making the country whole. The Italians had to grow up and to recognize that their tradition of rhetorical revolutionary violence led nowhere. He understood that everything in Italy had to change, "but not for this must one abandon the right road that will lead thousands and millions of Italians to salvation from death by idiocy and slow inanition." Reformism was that right road, Turati insisted.

Turati had come essentially to Bernstein's conclusions. In theoretical opposition, along with Kautsky, to Bernstein's express condemnation of proletarian revolution as an absurd concept for modern industrial societies, Turati nonetheless had, at most, semantic differences with the author of *Evolutionary Socialism*. He offered the same rebuttal

Bernstein did concerning Marx's celebration of proletarian violence. For his times, Marx was right to preach proletarian revolution, but the times had changed. Turati would not rule out revolution as a possible strategy for the proletariat. He would not go so far as Bernstein. Turati held that "certainly when a regime is rigid and dead, violence can be the forceps, but it is necessary for the fetus to be mature." By temperament and principle, however, he displayed no inclination at all to use such an instrument. On the subject of revolution, Turati always came back to Engels's late warnings about the general undesirability of proletarian violence in advanced capitalist societies. Turati concluded that the syndicalist obsession with violence indeed could provoke a revolution, but one that in turn would bring down on the proletariat "new reactions, new enslavements, and a new death to that little bit of democracy that begins to appear thanks above all to our [party's] efforts." He would have been for violence if it would work, he proclaimed, but a war cry, which was all the syndicalists offered, could not be presented to mature adults as a plan. For the Socialists to heed the heedless would be to condemn the party to perpetual adolescence.²⁹

Labriola rose to speak that same afternoon. He immediately denounced Turati's accusation of anarchism as a slander against syndicalism. By the reasoning of the reformists, "Marx and Engels were two anarchists of the worst species." No one who read *The Civil War in France* could have any doubt at all about "the powerful revolutionary passionateness [*passionalità*] of the great communist." In that book, Labriola declared, Marx's position on violence had made him a revolutionary syndicalist ahead of his time. Marxists, he continued, claimed this Marx of *The Civil War in France* as their own. Marxist dialectics, then, not anarchism's propaganda of the deed, animated revolutionary syndicalism.³⁰

Labriola then hurled some insults of his own against the reformists: "He who says that socialism is going to come about through reformism is either an imbecile incapable of comprehending the logic of a system or must admit that the natural conclusion of that premise is participation in the bourgeois power structure."³¹ In other words, reformism meant the death of socialism as an alternative to capitalism. The reformists wanted to fold socialism into capitalism under the unwarranted assumption that capitalists eventually would see the error of their ways and become socialists. Labriola countered that instead of pacifying the class struggle socialists should make it sharper. Turati

and the reformists wanted social peace, Labriola and the revolutionary syndicalists, class war. The Socialists would have to choose between these two completely antagonistic positions, and stop pretending, as they had at the Rome congress four years earlier, that reformism and revolution could coexist as the official programs of one and the same party.

Labriola asked the delegates how socialism could best be achieved, through reform or revolution. He thought this the central question before the congress. In addition to the reformists and the syndicalists, the party contained a centrist bloc, which, in the time-honored tradition of Italian socialism, wanted to have its revolution and delete it too. Labriola scorned the centrists as nothing more than a component of reformism. Revolution presented itself as an either/or choice. Any form of class collaboration undercut revolution, as the parliamentary experience of one country after another in Europe showed: *"Parliaments are not instruments of transformation."* Once inside parliament, Labriola explained, socialism became bent to the will of the institution, which existed solely for the defense of capitalism. Not in parliament would socialism be made the law of the land. At best, parliamentary socialists could only hope to render capitalism less degrading to the workers, an achievement that in fact would strengthen the capitalist establishment: "It is for this reason that we want to destroy the wage system with all of the political superstructure that supports it."³²

Sorelian echoes reverberated through Labriola's speech. Just as the state expresses the will of the capitalist class, so "the working class must shape itself outside [the establishment] in the union."³³ Worker unions and bourgeois states naturally collided with each other. In their collision Labriola saw the chief expression of the class struggle in his day. Success for one meant defeat for the other. Thus, Turati's strategy for the party, of working with the capitalists in parliament, could only lead to the surrender of the proletariat. True socialism entailed transferring the power of the state to the workers' unions. Every other political strategy would necessitate selling out the workers.

Michels, who participated in the Socialist party congresses of these years, described the syndicalists and the reformists as "the Montagues and the Capulets of Italian socialism." His first-hand account of the 1902, 1904, and 1906 congresses affords fascinating insights into the complex political alignments and highly varied culture of early twentieth-century Italian socialism. Party leaders, he noted, invariably came

from the bourgeoisie. Relatively few workers attended the congresses. Whenever a worker spoke, a solemn hush would settle on the usually noisy crowd. Delegates, in coming to full attention on such occasions, would actually say, "it is an authentic proletarian," as if they were observing a full eclipse of the sun or some other infrequent wonder of nature.³⁴

In his account of the Bologna congress, Michels underscored "the splendid intellectual duels between Turati and Labriola" as the climax of the proceedings.³⁵ He considered both factions revisionist; neither reflected Marxism with complete or even substantial fidelity. Both ignored some central elements of Marxism while exaggerating others to the point of distortion. Michels claimed that within the Socialist party a reformist revisionism clashed with a revolutionary revisionism. Their battle would continue, with Turati and Labriola as the principals, until the 1906 congress in Rome.

In the polemical aftermath of the Bologna congress, the two sides began preparation for a final showdown. Turati continued to attack the syndicalists as out-and-out anarchists. In a *Critica Sociale* editorial he declared that an "irreducible antagonism" existed between the two factions. They had no business being in the same party, he concluded. He recommended that they get a divorce, not that even this drastic measure would solve everything for the Socialists. The party would continue to be home to some exotic political specimens: "revolutionaries and semi-revolutionaries . . . intransigents of transigence, [and] revolutionaries of reformism," to say nothing of "the esthetes, the adorers of the beautiful gesture."³⁶ Genuine order could never be imposed on such a party. Nevertheless, Turati thought the syndicalists were beyond the pale. For years he had fought anarchism and had struggled successfully to keep it from contaminating socialism. His struggle now against syndicalism had the same prophylactic purpose. For the next two years Turati and his closest collaborators on *Critica Sociale* thundered against syndicalism as the great danger from within for socialism.

Reflections on Violence

Labriola answered Turati in articles and editorials for *Avanguardia Socialista*, but most fully in one of his major books, *Riforme e rivoluzione sociale* (1906), which appeared the same year as the articles by Sorel

that two years later would come out in book form as *Reflections on Violence*. In *Riforme e rivoluzione sociale*, Labriola continued to cite Sorel as the premier Marxist thinker of contemporary times, and he fully accepted the ultrarevolutionary line of reasoning in *Reflections on Violence*.

Sorel held that there could be no question about the utility of violence in history: "Certain individual criminal attempts have rendered such great services to democracy." Mankind advanced through revolution, civil war, and the physical suppression of tyrants. The progressive parliamentary socialists who no longer could entertain the idea of a worker insurrection simply had ceased to be Marxists. Far more honest and direct than these fallen-away intellectuals and politicians were the "workmen who understand perfectly well that all the trash of parliamentary literature only serves to disguise the real motives by which the government is influenced." They knew that the rich exploited them, that such exploitation was the essence of liberal politics.³⁷

The exploiters, however, had begun to falter. They were losing their nerve, Sorel thought. Everywhere in Europe he saw signs of bourgeois decadence and timidity. The upper middle class had become "terribly ignorant, gapingly stupid, and politically absolutely stupid."³⁸ These elites could be compared with the nobles of the eighteenth century for intellectual feebleness. They desired "to die in peace—after them the deluge." Nothing could be clearer, he asserted, than that the middle class as a whole had used up its allotted time on the stage of history. To compromise with it as the reformists wanted to do was unnecessary and wrong. Sorel condemned reformism itself as a bourgeois phenomenon: "The ideology of a timorous humanitarian middle class professing to have freed its thought from the conditions of its existence is grafted on the degeneration of the capitalist system." This class now asked to be allowed to live and rule in exchange for a larger mess of pottage than it formerly had dished out to the proletariat. The reformists wanted to make this allowance, but Sorel thought that the present situation called instead for a dictatorship of the proletariat: "The dangers which threaten the future of the world may be avoided, if the proletariat hold on with obstinacy to revolutionary ideas, so as to realize as much as possible Marx's conception."³⁹

Sorel waxed lyrical about the capacity of the general strike to further the cause of Marxist revolution. To liberate socialism from the clichéd

progressivism and pacifism of the dominant reformists, revolutionaries would have to heed Marx, who “wishes us to understand that the whole preparation of the proletariat depends solely on the organization of a stubborn, increasing, and passionate resistance to the present order of things.” Through the general strike, Sorel wanted to exacerbate the class war, to hasten its final eruption: “The day when the slightest incidents of daily life become symptoms of the state of war between the classes, when every conflict is an incident in the social war, when every strike begets the perspective of a total catastrophe, on that day there is no longer any possibility of social peace, of resignation to routine, or of enthusiasm for philanthropic or successful employers.” Socialism would have to retain its terrifying cumulative, dialectical violence and culminate in a revolution that would be terrible, absolute, and irrevocable. By this time Sorel had dispensed with “the revolution with a human face” rhetoric of “L’Avenir socialiste des syndicats.”⁴⁰

Along with many tributes to Marx in *Reflections on Violence*, Sorel also criticized him. He wanted the new school of Marxists to move beyond the formulas of Marx, who “was not always happily inspired.”⁴¹ Elements of the purest genius coexisted in the Marxist canon with a host of errors, shibboleths, and abstractions. Thus, Sorel wrote as a reverse Bernstein, who had proposed to rationalize Marxism by pruning it of its atavistic attitudes toward violence. Sorel, in contrast, wanted to mythicize these very attitudes and to make them the inviolable core of Marxism. Michels’s thesis about the two Marxist revisionisms, of the left and the right, finds its fullest fin-de-siècle illustration in Bernstein and Sorel.

Even before Sorel’s formal leavetaking of socialism in 1909, his commitment to Marxist theory was at most highly selective. In *Reflections on Violence* he challenged the central point of Marxist theory, that class war would be inevitable under capitalism. Inspired by the ideas of Gustave Le Bon about the essentially conservative nature of the laboring masses, Sorel believed that the capitalist system did not necessarily have to produce a proletarian revolution at all. Europe in 1906 showed almost no sign of revolutionary thought or action in the Marxist sense. He did not view the Russian Revolution of 1905 as a Marxist phenomenon or one that would have the slightest applicability to the advanced countries of the West where reformist socialism had evolved as the most extreme left-wing reaction in capitalist societies. A direct revolu-

tionary intervention would be required. Not socialism but only more refined versions of capitalism would evolve from the status quo.

Sorel interpreted revolutionary syndicalism not merely as a correct interpretation and imaginative application of Marxism but also as an augmentation of the ideology. Reformist and temporizing elements could be found in Marx's thought—what Sorel called his “humanitarian idiocy.”⁴² Removing these elements and replacing them with an extension and clarification of Marx's often elliptical arguments about proletarian violence would yield a much improved and, in effect, “new” ideology.

To achieve perfection, Sorel contended, Marxism required the insights of Henri Bergson and Friedrich Nietzsche. Revolutionary syndicalism could not be carried to triumph with the conventional rationalism and morality of modern man. Sorel thought that modernity had begun with the Enlightenment and had produced the lowest of human types, the soulless materialist who could not even imagine a higher life. In a society of such inferior specimens, no revolutionary impulse would ever appear. Only a new caste of warriors, endowed with the power of their own myth, could overcome the deadly inertia of modernity. Revolution, then, did not arise primarily from class struggle, but from the clash of competing myths. It would be difficult to imagine a more thoroughgoing revision of dialectical materialism than this by someone still calling himself a Marxist.

Reforms and Social Revolution

Labriola published *Riforme e rivoluzione sociale* in the heat of political battle, not as a reflective treatise on revolutionary theory but as a practical manual for the moment. In *Reflections on Violence*, Sorel sought to fashion a grand philosophical synthesis of Marxist, Bergsonian, and Nietzschean elements. In *Riforme e rivoluzione sociale*, Labriola presented what he hoped would be a winning political strategy for his faction in the Italian Socialist party.

Citing Sorel as his theoretical guide, Labriola called for a return to “Marx himself.” The authentic Marx, who unfailingly applauded the violence of the French Revolution and the Paris Commune, supplied the most telling arguments against reformism Italian style. “We act in the spirit of Marxism,” which Labriola insisted on calling first and fore-

most “a theory of action” and “a subversive practice.”⁴³ The essence of Marxism lay in Marx’s famous statement about revolution in *The Communist Manifesto*: the goals of the communists “cannot be reached without the violent destruction of the existing social order in its entirety.” Labriola dwelled on that sentence in his analysis of Marxist revolution. One could accept Marx’s claim or reject it. Labriola accepted it and thought that in good conscience he could call himself a Marxist. To the infinite confusion of Italian political and intellectual life, the reformists rejected Marx’s claim about revolution while simultaneously claiming to be Marxists.

If it had been merely a question of an occasional incitement to revolution here and there in the canon of Marx, the reformists might have been able to make a plausible case for their position. Unfortunately for them, Marx repeatedly called for “revolutionary terror,” and he never spoke against the principle of it, conceding only that violence should be employed in circumstances favorable to the cause of the proletariat.⁴⁴ Such a mildly cautionary statement hardly constituted the repudiation of violence that the reformists imagined they found in Marx’s books. Engels, endlessly cited by the reformists, had gotten Marx wrong as well, at least at the end of his life when he declaimed against proletarian violence in modern industrial societies. Precisely in the societies then leading the entire world into the gilded cage of capitalism Marxist revolution was most urgently needed.

Labriola included in the sixth chapter of *Riforme e rivoluzione sociale*, “Violence in Marx’s System,” a compilation of quotations, particularly from chapters 8 and 24 in *Capital*, regarding the master’s aggressive opposition to the peaceful reconciliation between capital and labor. The overwhelming preponderance of textual evidence in Marx’s writings led inescapably to the conclusion that the expropriation of capital could only be conducted with “the use of the most pitiless violence and under the influence of the most infamous passions.” Labriola thought that Marx’s starkly revolutionary thesis “had frightened the scholars,” causing them to conduct a timid un-Marxist campaign of understatement, minimalization, and outright denial about the real meaning of communism.⁴⁵

Labriola praised Sorel for being the most powerful critic of reformism as a deceitful misrepresentation of Marxist thought and for pioneering “an accurate scientific critique of Marxism.” Sorel underlined

the complete coherence of Marx's thought on the subject of revolution. Here Labriola drew attention to the principal lesson that Sorel had imparted to him. Sorel understood, as Marx did, that history is not determined by the niceties of law, but by force. Marxism taught that ultimately the workers cannot have recourse to the law because it exists for the protection and advancement of people with money. Like all political institutions, the law arose as a superstructural phenomenon, directly connected with and thoroughly conditioned by the economic substructure of society. Sorel had reminded a generation of socialists corrupted by reformism that the substructure and superstructures of capitalism kept the status quo in place. All of these structures would have to be destroyed if the proletariat were ever to fulfill its socialist destiny.

Sorel had revived genuine Marxism, according to Labriola. The great French thinker had returned to the original texts, had identified the revolutionary core of Marx's thought, and from "a truly scientific point of view" had proved the falsity of reformism. He had infuriated all the reformists by formulating a purely Marxist rebuttal to their gradualist arguments. Marx himself had written repeatedly about "parliamentary cretinism" as an incurable disease of the bourgeoisie. Capitalist politics worked the way capitalist laws did, as a relief system for the investing classes. From Marx to Sorel the pure stream of revolutionary thought irresistibly flowed. The reformists wanted to divert this stream into their turbid backwater.⁴⁶

Applying the principles of Marx and Sorel to the contemporary scene invariably triggered extreme reactions from the reformists, Labriola complained. He had grown used to hearing self-styled Marxists call him a criminal madman for saying that Italy needed a revolution. His campaign for the general strike as a means of sparking the revolution earned him the most opprobrious insults. Turati led the reformist chorus against Labriola. In the pages of *Critica Sociale* he denounced revolutionary syndicalism as a manifestation of "petit-bourgeois reaction." Labriola replied in *Riforme e rivoluzione sociale*: "It is the old story of the thief who, in order to lead his pursuers astray, shouts, 'Get the thief!'" Under Turati the Socialist party had become thoroughly bourgeois, always defending legality and repudiating "every act of collective violence." Labriola thought that Italy had the most conservative Socialist party in Europe.⁴⁷

Semi-monarchist and parliamentarian, the Italian Socialist party had lost all contact with revolutionary reality, in Labriola's judgment. He explained the bourgeois character of the party in part as a result of statistics. Middle-class professionals occupied virtually all of the key leadership positions. The thirty-five Socialist deputies in parliament included eleven lawyers, six professors and teachers, three journalists, three businessmen, and only three individuals who possibly could be called workers. Labriola could not think of a single major socialist editor or leading journalist who came from the proletariat. In some party sections, all the members had middle-class backgrounds. Thus, "the Socialist party can be defined as an effective organization for the moral and material interests of the professional class, and from this fact many degenerative phenomena arise." Such phony radicals naturally would bristle upon being exposed as the capitalist establishment's most subtle and carefully camouflaged defenders. Their idea of progress was to add another coat of gold leaf to the capitalist cage while at the same time pretending to be furthering the cause of revolution. No Marxist deserving of the name could be taken in by such obfuscatory nonsense, Labriola believed. For the cause of revolution to be furthered seriously, "a decisive war" would have to be fought against the reformists.⁴⁸

In *Riforme e rivoluzione sociale* Labriola did not merely imitate the Sorel of *Reflections on Violence*. He had much less interest than Sorel did in pure theory, completely ignoring Bergson and Nietzsche. Labriola kept returning to Marx and to Sorel's often brilliant commentary on Marx. Labriola and Sorel had the same vision of Marxist revolution. For Labriola that vision was sufficient unto his political needs in 1906. Sorel, in contrast, already was looking to supplement Marx with other thinkers. He thought that Marx needed enrichment, in much the same way that Renaissance humanists theorized that Plato, Cicero, and Seneca would add a vital new dimension to Christ. *Riforme e rivoluzione sociale* reveals that in 1906 Labriola still had a Savonarolian yearning for the unalloyed old-time religion.

Final Battles for Syndicalism

At the party's 1906 congress in Rome, Labriola presented the case for revolutionary syndicalism. He addressed the delegates as "comrades

and adversaries.” Three groups of delegates vied for power at the congress, he claimed: reformists, syndicalists, and centrists. There were, however, only two positions—pro and con—on the issue that mattered most: revolution. About his own group, Labriola said, “We are of the Marxists, and we are of the Marxists being syndicalists.” Ferri’s centrists he dismissed as reformists who still had the psychological need to think of themselves as revolutionaries even though, in practical terms, they were going along with Turati’s agenda. Andrea Costa, the former anarchist conspirator and now the venerable president of the Socialist congress, repeatedly had to call for order during Labriola’s speech. The reformists and centrists, hearing themselves called false socialists, responded with a chorus of disrespectful noises.⁴⁹

Pandemonium broke out when Labriola declared, in denigrating reformism, “What difference does it make if the worker labors a half-hour more or less?”⁵⁰ Two-thirds of the delegates burst into what the congress secretary described as “most lively ironic applause” accompanied by sniggering cries of “Well said!” and “Bravo!” Labriola tried to recover, but his adversaries kept hooting at him. At length, Costa’s pleas for order prevailed, and Labriola resumed his speech, insisting that he had not said anything foolish. He only had meant that Socialists should be concerned not with chipping away here and there at the rough edges of factory life, but with “destroying capitalist society.” Marxists had to be about the business of revolution or lose their identity. Labriola closed by promising that the syndicalists would leave the party if it utterly ceased to be a revolutionary force. He understood that Turati wanted the syndicalists to leave, but prophesied that from the womb of the Socialist party other revolutionaries would come. The syndicalists would not be the last students of Marx to grasp his plain meaning and to seek the implementation of it in the country’s political life.

Turati spoke against Labriola on the next day, 9 October. His theme was essentially the same one he had addressed in Bologna two years before. Once again he told the delegates that the syndicalists, having nothing in common with mainstream socialism—“neither in doctrine nor in methods”—should leave the party. The Socialists could not continue fighting “like dogs and cats,” he insisted.⁵¹ Marx’s appeals to violence, from which the ideology of syndicalism derived the breath of life, could not be singled out as the essence of Marxism. So much had

changed in Marx's own thinking since he had uttered these appeals in his early work, to say nothing of changes in the world, that the premise of syndicalism seemed ludicrous to Turati.

Now more than ever drawn to the style and the substance of Bernstein's arguments, Turati reasoned that because the condition of the proletariat was improving the assumptions of Marxist catastrophism no longer existed outside the perfervid fantasies of the syndicalists. He judged the syndicalists to be "mystics, messianists, who await a species of apocalypse . . . that will come in the fullness of time." They embodied the left's will-o'-the-wisp. With them "catastrophe becomes a fact of literature, a tragedy of the stage, a poetic vision." The syndicalists raised "the temperature of the revolutionary spirit" in Italy while showing contempt for "the small daily reforms" that they believed would corrupt and postpone the revolution. Turati did not fault their goal of an equal and just society, but politics did not deal only with goals. Means had to be considered as well.⁵²

Turati posed a question: How could the Italian population of 1906 best be brought to socialism? In the wonderfully abstract world of the perfect revolution, such mundane considerations as the quality of the population did not matter. In the real world, though, it was otherwise. He did not think that the current generation of Italians could move the country very far. Without dietary, educational, and socioeconomic reforms the syndicalist goal would remain a mirage. Turati mocked the syndicalists for refusing to support the reform of existing society: "They are preparing, in order to conquer this new society, an underfed, starving, uncultivated, rude people, an army of slaves to realize the grand liberty of the world." The sooner the Socialist party freed itself from the dangerously deluded syndicalists, Turati concluded, the better.⁵³

The syndicalists seceded from the Socialist party the following year. In retrospect, they had reached their high water mark in 1904. In September of that year Italy had had its first general strike. When it ended in dismal failure, the real weakness of the syndicalists stood revealed. Their influence in the party began to diminish, and in compensation they became still more radical. Once outside the party, they quickly lost cohesiveness as a group. Labriola's principal allies—Sergio Panunzio, Angelo Oliviero Olivetti, Paolo Orano, Agostino Lanzillo, Edmondo Rossoni, Filippo Corridoni, and Enrico Leone—began to

go their own ways.⁵⁴ The movement ceased to exist and passed into history as the leading specimen for its day of Italian political extremism.

Though victorious against the syndicalists, Turati did not cease to worry about them. In *Critica Sociale* he relentlessly attacked syndicalism as a continuing danger to the party and the country. At the 1908 party congress in Florence, he noted with satisfaction the secession of the syndicalists, but expressed concern about the lingering effects of their ideas on Italian socialism. There had always been two major conceptions of socialism, Turati told the delegates: the revolutionary tradition embodied first in anarchism and lately in syndicalism, and “that of the complete, prudent, gradual action of acquisition, of legislation, of education.” He totally rejected the first of these two conceptions. Though the syndicalists had left the party, socialism still had to be liberated from “the revolutionary anarchist infatuation of belief in the miracle of sudden social rebirth.” This belief continued to linger in the bloodstream of Italian socialism like a dormant bacillus.⁵⁵

The second conception, according to which socialism could only come to pass through hard work and a single-minded pursuit of democracy in all of its aspects, beckoned to sensible socialists as the only way for the proletariat to fulfill the destiny that Marx had prophesied for it, Turati proclaimed. To depart from the commonsense approach to socialism, “to want to drag the proletariat toward distant heavens to which it cannot go, will be a metaphysical speculation, it will be a beautiful poem, but outside of life, of history, of reality.” Even in this moment of triumph for his party policies, Turati feared that “the working-class movement, as with every movement in history, can experience degenerations, betrayals, fatal delusions.” The syndicalist myth of the general strike had been just such a development.⁵⁶

Back in Naples as of August 1906, where he worked as a lawyer and taught political economy at the university, Labriola continued to write and to be active in politics. He always thought of Naples as his “natural port of refuge.”⁵⁷ Married and a father now, he entered an extremely productive period of his life as an author. From 1907 to 1909 he edited *Pagine Libere* with Paolo Orano and in 1910 published *Storia di dieci anni, 1899–1909*, his best-known book today. Labriola remained a syndicalist, but after the group’s seceding congress at Ferrara in the summer of 1907 he became increasingly skeptical about the prospects in Italy for any real change along the lines laid down by Marx and

Sorel. At 34, after nearly twenty years in radical politics, his faith in revolution began to ebb.

One of Labriola's leading biographers, Dora Marucco, describes him as "uncertain and hesitating" at this time.⁵⁸ The failure of the general strike, the defeat of the syndicalists in the Socialist party, and the seeming hopelessness of the cause of revolution in Italy compelled him to rethink his ideas. Labriola long had been critical of Marxist economic theory for its contrived character and false emphasis on the labor theory of value, but in a 1908 book, *Marx nell'economia e come teorico del socialismo* (Marx on the Economy and as a Theorist of Socialism), he expanded on these arguments and departed more than ever from Marx's conceptual framework and terminology.⁵⁹ Marx he continued to revere as a political thinker and, above all, as a philosopher of action, but Marxist economic theory simply had no place in the real world. From Marx's own premises about the dialectic of history, Labriola reached laissez-faire economic conclusions about capitalism: the natural capitalist cycle from which socialism would issue should not be disrupted. The practical political implications of these conclusions began to surface in Labriola's mind soon after his discovery from experience that the proletariat lacked an efficacious revolutionary aspiration. Labriola's articles in *Pagine Libere* reflected a palpable ideological shift away from extremism, and *Storia di dieci anni* confirmed this trend.

Many years later, in *Spiegazioni a me stesso*, Labriola would lament that his generation did not deserve "to be so unjustly betrayed by destiny." In truth, politics—not destiny—had betrayed them. They had believed in socialism as a rational and positive force that would lead to the discovery of truth and make it manifest in society. Socialism, however, had led them on a winding course. The magnitude of Italy's problems "made us apostles and agitators." Their idealism propelled them forward against "the ignorant and brutal landowners, a crude and superstitious clergy, a voracious and insatiable capitalism." Recalling his revolutionary syndicalist youth, Labriola plaintively cried in his memoir, "I know that we were sincere." Nevertheless, all of their efforts against Giolittian Italy had failed.⁶⁰

Labriola had admitted as much in 1910. In *Storia di dieci anni* he ex-

plained what had gone wrong in Italy: "In sum, there is no doubt that the 'system' of Giolitti has been completely successful." The prime minister, indeed, had become "the real boss of the so-called democracy," which in reality stood for nothing more than an elaborate scheme guaranteeing favors, influence, and public works contracts in exchange for support of the liberal political system. Labriola could see no way out for the country. The triumph of the reformists in the Socialist party had snuffed out the spirit of revolution. He felt certain that the de facto alliance between Giolitti and Turati eventually would lead the workers and the peasants to disaster, the occurrence of which might signal "the hour of revolutionary minorities."⁶¹ Then everything would depend on knowing how to be prepared for the moment of revolution. Labriola himself soon drifted to the socialist right, embracing imperialism as the only solution for Italy's problems, but long before his death in 1959 he gave up completely on socialism.⁶² Already, however, a new generation of revolutionary Marxists had appeared in Italy to challenge the reformists.

Benito Mussolini: The Indispensable Revolutionary

The ideas of Socialism cannot be kept intact by diluting the phrases of Marxism in verbose commentaries, but by continually adapting the spirit of Marx to facts which are capable of assuming a revolutionary aspect.

—Georges Sorel, *Reflections on Violence*

Mussolini looms over the twentieth century as a world-historical figure because of his paramount role as the shaper and leader of fascism. In *Ideology and Utopia: An Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge* (1936), Karl Mannheim interpreted current Western intellectual and political history as a struggle, essentially, among four ideological traditions: liberalism, conservatism, socialism, and fascism.¹ Each of these traditions has had its denominations, sects, and cults. Clear-cut lines of demarcation among the four cannot always be discerned. Indeed, despite their fierce political antagonisms and very real practical dissimilarities, liberalism and conservatism stem from the same basic philosophical values, differing fundamentally over means but not ends. Fascism and socialism also share some ideological bloodlines, but the political and military clashes between these two traditions resulted in the most ferocious ideological enmity of the twentieth century.

The scholarly literature on Mussolini is unmanageably vast and predictably polemical. The historian's problems in finding sufficient materials on Cafiero and even on the two Labriolas for certain periods of their lives are reversed for Mussolini. In his case, an overload of documentation and research impedes synthesis. Unquestionably, the most prolific researcher in Mussolini studies, as well as the most controversial figure in the field, has been Renzo De Felice. His death in 1996 did not stop the polemics that his prodigiously researched and instigatively argued eight-volume biography of Mussolini (1965–1997) engendered. In two published interviews, De Felice declared that he had written his biography in opposition to the conventional wisdom

about fascism.² The bulk of the scholarly literature on Mussolini, according to De Felice, reflected the values and prejudices of the left-wing academic establishment in Italy: Marxist and semi-Marxist diatribes long had passed for objective scholarly analysis of fascism. De Felice's charges produced the inevitable counter-charges, and through all the commotion that accompanied the periodic publication of the eight volumes, his name was in the foreground of the scholarly debate about who Mussolini was, what he did, and what his place in history should be.

The title of the first volume, *Mussolini il rivoluzionario, 1883–1920*, was a provocation because it made clear something that the Italian left would prefer to forget: Mussolini, the founder of fascism, was once one of them. Moreover, for a short period before World War I, he led the most extreme faction on the left. How Mussolini grew into and out of this leadership role had a profound impact on the development of the revolutionary Marxist tradition in Italy.

De Felice's biography begins with an account of the strong influence exerted on Mussolini by his father, Alessandro, but a better starting point would have been the setting of young Benito's formative years. In Mussolini we encounter the first non-Neapolitan in our series of portraits. He was born on 29 July 1883 in the Romagna, a region in north-central Italy that Jacob Burckhardt described as "the hotbed of every ferocious passion." Political violence flourished in the Romagna down to modern times. After the fall of Napoleon, Austrian military power reinforced the papal political establishment there, but invariably order dissolved the moment the troops left. In the three decades before unification, the Romagna seethed with revolutionary dissidence and had the reputation of being the most turbulent province in Italy. Unification in 1860 did not change the basic situation in the province. Peasant agitations and revolts occurred frequently, and the Romagna became a bastion of anarchism. In the early 1870s Bakunin thought that of all the regions in Italy, the Romagna offered the best prospects for anarchist revolt. "It is necessary for *the land to belong to the peasants*," he wrote in January 1872 to Lodovico Nabruzzi of Ravenna, the anarchist editor of the *Romagnolo*—and until they took over ownership of the means of cultivation the status quo would be a legitimate target of subversion.³

Andrea Costa, Bakunin's chief lieutenant in Italy, was a *romagnolo*. Eventually, he embraced the socialist movement, but the anarchism of his youth left its mark on him. Mussolini's father, Alessandro, greatly admired Costa, and anarchism strongly tinged his socialist thinking as well. An uneducated blacksmith, he nevertheless became a prominent figure in the local socialist circles of the Romagna. The authorities viewed him as a dangerous subversive. Five years before Benito's birth, he spent six months in jail, and other scrapes with the law would follow. Benito Andrea Amilcare Mussolini—who was named after the Mexican revolutionary Benito Juárez, Costa, and Italy's most famous veteran of the Paris Commune, Amilcare Cipriani—began life with this very left-wing socialist-anarchist vision of the world. Soon he began to avail himself of his self-taught father's small library, which included Cafiero's compendium of *Capital*. Such reading made sense for him of his family's distress and of the great social agitations of the 1890s. The young Mussolini thus acquired a revolutionary faith in violence as the only way to extract a decent society from the intolerable mess that capitalism had made of the world.

The family's poverty also contributed to Mussolini's worldview. Although he always remembered his childhood as a time of want, difficulties arise in trying to pin down the family's exact class status. One of his most balanced biographers, Pierre Milza, notes: "If because of the scarcity of its resources the family of the future fascist leader belongs incontestably to the world of the 'little people,' certain social and cultural practices reveal its petty bourgeois origin and the aspiration to return to this stratum of society."⁴ Mussolini's father was a worker, to be sure, but the family had only recently been proletarianized. Grandfather Luigi had been a small landowner before financial reverses compromised his class status and that of his son. Mussolini's mother, Rosa, came from a much better-off family than that of her husband. Her father practiced the profession of veterinary medicine and owned property in Forlì. Well educated by the standards of the time, she taught school and had cultural ambitions for her children. It is significant that the family spoke Italian and not dialect at home. Moreover, the Mussolinis were a family of readers. Mussolini regarded himself as a man of the people, but his upbringing was not proletarian.

Educated to be a teacher, Mussolini soon discovered that he lacked the temperament to succeed in his chosen field. He passed through a

pivotal period in Switzerland (1902–1904), where he went to look for employment. In keeping with his ambiguous class background, Mussolini worked as a laborer at odd jobs and sat in on Pareto's lectures at the University of Lausanne before finally hitting upon journalism as his real talent in life. He formed important relationships with Giacinto Menotti Serrati and Angelica Balabanov. Eleven years older than Mussolini, Serrati edited *Avvenire del Lavoratore* and was the leading figure among the Italian socialists in Switzerland. He helped Mussolini in his initial forays into journalism. Balabanov, a Russian-Jewish left-wing activist who had studied with Antonio Labriola at the University of Rome, became Mussolini's principal intellectual mentor during these years. Along with Serrati, she deepened his radicalism and gave it a sharper Marxist edge. Mussolini's first pamphlet appeared in 1904, "L'uomo e la divinità" (Man and the Divinity), a harangue that established his anticlerical credentials. Religious tolerance among socialists went hand in hand with reformism, and Mussolini's vehement atheism boosted his standing with the party's revolutionary wing.

At the same time, Mussolini began to absorb the ideas of the revolutionary syndicalists. He never joined them formally, but De Felice claims that in their writings he found "some theories destined to become the foundations of his conception of politics."⁵ Most of all he valued the revolutionary syndicalists for their scathing denunciations of the *turati*, that is, all those reformists content to soldier on in support of the liberal status quo. He agreed with the revolutionary syndicalists on their main point, that violent revolution alone would put an end to the human misery engendered by that status quo. During this Swiss interlude, Mussolini began to write antireformist articles for Arturo Labriola's *Avanguardia Socialista*, and he continued to do so after coming back to Italy in 1904.

Mussolini returned home for economic and family reasons, served in the army from December 1904 to September 1906, and then resumed his search for stable employment. He made two more tries at teaching, but definitively gave it up after the 1907–1908 academic year because it did not suit his temperament. Various book projects that he conceived at this time came to nothing. With revolutionary syndicalist journals and other radical publications open to him, journalism alone held out the promise of professional success. He enjoyed a growing reputation in those circles, particularly for his trademark slashing style.

Mussolini celebrated the creative genius of Karl Marx and the interpretive brilliance of Antonio Labriola, but the writers who lent his early socialism its distinctive coloring were Georges Sorel and Friedrich Nietzsche.⁶ From Sorel, he obtained an understanding of the role that violence would have to play in the socialist revolution of the future. Under the influence of Sorel's thought, Mussolini declared: "Today I do not hesitate to proclaim that socialism could not exist without a defense [*apologia*] of violence." Only by virtue of resistance to capitalism, now through the general strikes recommended by Sorel and in the future through full-blown Marxist revolution, could the proletariat affirm its existence. Every current strike, Mussolini reasoned, was a step along the path leading ultimately to the revolution against capitalism. Violent strikes prepared the way for the final capitalist-proletarian showdown "during which the bosses and the state will be eliminated by the organized producers."⁷

In his passion for Nietzsche, Mussolini followed one of the main arguments in *Reflections on Violence*. Sorel thought Nietzsche not only compatible with Marxism but necessary to it as well. In short, without the kind of moral revolution envisaged by Nietzsche, the socioeconomic revolution of Marx would remain a pipe dream. Revolution required just the kind of hardness and ruthlessness that Nietzsche's values inculcated. Mussolini agreed with Nietzsche's indictment of Christianity as the fundamental cause of European decadence. Christianity had turned the natural world on its head, and as a result of its enfeebling ethic the infirm and the halt had gotten the absurd idea that they—not the strong and the swift—had superior moral claims on humanity. Thus, "the weak triumph over the strong and the pallid Jews smash Rome."⁸

Mussolini's ideological eclecticism in no way would have made him an oddity on the Italian left during the prewar period. Antonio Labriola had lamented that among the Italians he alone believed in a Marxism without additives from other traditions. The research of Roberto Michels seconded Labriola's opinion. Marxism existed and even flourished in Italy, but not as an inviolable doctrine. Revisions of Marxism on the left and right proliferated there as in no other European country. An exceptionally talented journalist, Mussolini did not probe texts in any kind of depth. He was no Antonio Labriola, nor did he aspire to be. He picked up his ideology as he went along from sources as diverse as Marx and Nietzsche, mainly through the interpre-

tations of intimates like Balabanov and Serrati or mediating writers like Sorel.

The reasons for Mussolini's early success cannot be found in his run-of-the-mill ideas. De Felice, drawing heavily on an important profile written in 1919 by Giovanni Gasti—a police inspector—traces the origins of Mussolini's success to his "vitalism." Under a section of the report entitled "Physical-Psychological Characteristics," the first thing that Gasti noted was Mussolini's exceptionally strong physical constitution, which, despite the ravages of venereal disease, enabled him to work fifteen-hour days routinely. In 1909 Mussolini had begun to live with Rachele Guidi, the youngest daughter of his father's mistress, but family life never interfered with his inveterate womanizing. Gasti also emphasized the importance of Mussolini's high intelligence. He had a quick and alert mind. Yet "at bottom" he was emotional, impulsive, and sentimental—qualities that in Gasti's opinion gave him extraordinary human appeal and contributed markedly to his success as a speaker. Mussolini also had an ambition to match his physical and mental gifts. He had no interest at all in making money but did aspire to domination. With a significance for the long-standing debate among scholars over whether ideas mattered to him in themselves or merely as a means to political ends, Gasti asserted that Mussolini did not appear to be "tenacious in his convictions and designs"; that is, the aspiration to domination transcended all the particular programs he espoused.⁹

The Class Struggle

Gasti's description serves as a major source of illumination for De Felice in *Mussolini il rivoluzionario*. From obscure origins, Mussolini rose on the strength of a major journalistic talent and outstanding leadership qualities to the top of the Socialist party in the space of a few short years. In 1910 he became the editor of Forlì's *La Lotta di Classe*, a position that liberated him from literary hackwork. He made a brilliant success of this opportunity. At the same time, he added to his prestige as an emerging star in the Socialist party by writing articles for the major intellectual journals of the day, most notably *La Voce*.¹⁰

Mussolini developed a relationship of mutual admiration with Giuseppe Prezzolini, the editor of *La Voce*. In May 1909 Mussolini had

written an appreciative review of Prezzolini's book on revolutionary syndicalism, *La teoria sindacalista*. Though Prezzolini had a long history as a politically conservative intellectual, going back to his association with Enrico Corradini and the right-wing *Regno*, Mussolini thought him eminently fair in his treatment of revolutionary syndicalism. Mussolini expressly identified himself in the review as "a revolutionary syndicalist by now for five years." He also explained how he differentiated socialism from revolutionary syndicalism: the first stemmed ultimately from Christianity, but the second, tending toward the future and "the creation of new personalities, new values, and *homines novi*," had a decidedly Nietzschean character. It also stood squarely for revolution whereas mainstream socialism aspired to nothing more than a few innocuous reforms in exchange for a peaceful accommodation with the status quo. Prezzolini had caught all of these nuances and also understood the unsurpassed importance of Sorel for the revolutionary syndicalists: "Our master," Mussolini called Sorel.¹¹

Mussolini praised the master's *Reflections on Violence* as one of the supreme intellectual achievements of the age. The book struck him as a stunning triumph of style and as another example of why "Georges Sorel belongs to that small group of writers that one gladly reads."¹² Sorel's theory of myths, in particular, fascinated Mussolini. History, Sorel had convinced him, really turned on the great myths: Christianity, the Reformation, the French Revolution, Mazzinianism, and socialism. A utopian vision insusceptible to proof animated each one of them, and they all had begun to falter with their subjection to rational criteria. Now proletarian violence had issued from the womb of history as a new myth. Sorel had interpreted this myth in a Marxist language free of all humanitarian cant. The revolutionary syndicalists proposed to act on the myth of proletarian violence and to preserve its heroic element of poetry from the banalization of prose. By taking the intransigent Marxist line all the way to a Hyperion realm beyond good and evil, Sorel had set a sublime moral example for the revolutionary syndicalists in Italy.

Though revolutionary syndicalism had been greatly weakened by 1910, Mussolini identified with its vision of socialism. He sought to make *La Lotta di Classe* the beacon of the revolutionary cause in Italy. In his editorials and articles, he damned the reformists, mainly Turati, for "lawyerly socialism."¹³ The *turatiani*, however, appeared to be invin-

cible. At the Milan congress of the Socialists in 1910, the still rustic-looking Mussolini made an unfortunate impression. His speech set off a cacophony of hoots, cackles, and whistles. Turati remained the master of the Socialist party.

On the whole, Mussolini would have preferred to forget about the year 1910. Rebuffed at the party congress, he soon afterward was horrified to learn about Sorel's "acrobatic" shift toward the right in support of Charles Maurras's Action Française. It was as if the sun had gone dark and cold in Mussolini's firmament. Sorel's apostasy left the dwindling band of revolutionary syndicalists utterly bereft. Mussolini reported that the December 1910 congress of revolutionary syndicalists in Bologna had been an exhibit for the museum. Their master, Sorel, had deserted them, and they had shown themselves capable of nothing but bickering and fanaticism—"a true chaos," Mussolini called it. Arturo Labriola, in particular, had become an isolated and pathetic figure in "this pedantic academy of subversives in slippers."¹⁴

The outbreak of the Libyan War in 1911 between Italy and Turkey revived the revolutionary left and brightened Mussolini's prospects in the party. He used *La Lotta di Classe* as a pulpit from which to rain down anathemas on the Socialist reformists, who either supported the war or, according to him, were opposing it with insufficient vigor. He denounced Leonida Bissolati for being in the first category of reformists and Turati for being in the second. Nothing short of an endorsement of a general strike against the war would satisfy Mussolini, and all he could see in "the literary and wordy demagoguery of Turati" was the usual humanitarian blather that always ended in support of the status quo.¹⁵

In fact, Turati vehemently opposed the Libyan War as an insane waste of Italian resources. In *Critica Sociale* on 1 October 1911 he blamed the war on "the stock exchange cabals that are the key to so much of the political life in every modern country." He hated imperialism in all of its forms, and at a Socialist congress in Modena on 17 October he declared: "The colonial history of all nations is always, more or less, about brigandage." In the Libyan War, however, "ours is brigandage in its purest form. With the aggravating circumstance of being perfectly fruitless; of turning itself, first and above all, against the interests of our own country."¹⁶

The leaders of the extreme left had accused Turati of being soft on imperialism. They had reasoned that, according to his logic, if Libya were a paradise for Italian colonists then a Turatian case could be made for imperialism. In his speech before the delegates at the Socialist congress in Modena, Turati deflected this attack in a way that his adversaries condemned as the height of perversity: "We could be thoroughly Marxist, I say to you, revolutionary comrades, who present yourselves so often as the only faithful interpreters of the great master—and see in the conquest of colonies a hateful but fatal necessity in the development of capitalism; a development that is the precondition for the rise of socialism."¹⁷ Here Turati was reminding them of Marx's own acknowledgment of British imperialism in India as a necessary phase of the historical dialectic: the native cultures, toward which Marx entertained no sentimentality whatsoever, would have to go out of the underdeveloped world if scientific socialism ever were to come into it. Many self-styled Marxists—and Turati mentioned Arturo Labriola by name—were partly defending Italy's war in Tripoli on just this Marxist ground.

Turati professed not to need any theory at all to arrive at the obvious conclusion about the Libyan War, that it was an idiotic and immoral policy for Italy. Why, he asked, should a backward and poor country "that has not yet succeeded in eliminating barbarism and the Middle Ages from a large part of itself" pour treasure that it did not have and would have to borrow into a desert across the sea? There could be no rational defense of such a policy, and Turati voted with the revolutionary-left faction in its opposition to those members of the Socialist party, principally Leonida Bissolati and Ivanoe Bonomi, who had supported the government. Yet Turati refused to go along with what he called "the uncivil and Jacobin" proposal of the revolutionary left to expel Bissolati and Bonomi from the party. A party of heretics, the Socialist party should not fear heresy. Its members did "not proceed from absolute principles," Turati claimed, but from a living faith. Such a faith, "pure [and] secure, [did] not think of protecting itself with anathemas," which only came to mind when a party began to doubt itself.¹⁸

Arrested on 14 October 1911 and given a one-year jail sentence for interfering with the war effort, Mussolini played no role at the Modena congress. He emerged from prison on 12 March 1912 a na-

tional hero to the extreme left. He immediately resumed his attack against those socialists who had come out in favor of the war. Arturo Labriola he denounced as “the once fiery Neapolitan revolutionary” who had become the intellectual bauble of the war hawks. Against Bissolati, the leader of the pro-war reformists, he invoked the name of Marx—“the magnificent philosopher of violence”—who declaimed against proletarian solidarity with bourgeois governments.

By their fruits alone could ideologies be judged, and in accordance with this standard Mussolini felt justified in calling reformism a monstrosity, root and branch. The reformist ideology ineluctably had led to an embrace of the status quo. It had brought into being the truly freakish phenomenon of “patriotic socialism.” With an unwitting irony that the fullness of time would reveal, Mussolini declared that socialism was universal and aspired to transcend the particulars of nationality. Only two countries mattered anyway: that of the “exploited” and that of the “exploiters.” He contended that “the nation is a fiction, a mystification, a conventional lie.” The reformists expressly contradicted Marx’s immortal cry, “Workers of the world unite!” They thereby confused all the crucial issues between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. Mussolini could think of no better example of this terrible confusion than the spectacle of “socialists” like Labriola and Bissolati urging the workers to fight the imperialist war in Libya.¹⁹

At the 1912 Socialist congress in Reggio Emilia, Mussolini led the revolutionary intransigents. He spoke on the afternoon of 8 July in the Teatro Ludovico Ariosto, and this time he was in tune with the occasion. He began by blasting the culture of “parliamentary cretinism” that had produced the current mess in Libya. By playing Giolitti’s political game, Turati had condemned the Socialists to a loser’s hand. Tamed and housebroken, the Socialists lacked the means to offer effective opposition to the status quo. They had supported Giolitti and King Victor Emmanuel III—“a useless citizen by definition”—and capitalist imperialism had only been strengthened and emboldened. With eloquence and passion, Mussolini demanded an end to what he called the obviously failed strategy of reformism. The Socialists required a compact revolutionary party, one that would take the leading role in dismantling “the chaotic and incoherent Italian democracy, hitting it and assaulting it from every direction.” The most egregious Socialists of the right would have to go. He wanted Bissolati, his allies, and his

followers formally proscribed. Perhaps they could then find a place of welcome at the Quirinale or the Vatican. If these false Socialists liked, they could consort with the king or the pope, “but the Socialist party declares that it is not disposed to follow them, not today, not tomorrow, not ever.”²⁰

Turati spoke the next day. Once again he condemned the Libyan War: “Much more than the injury to the rights of people, the offense against humanity, and the perversion that it creates in the proletariat,” it was “the education in ferocity and incivility” that made the war odious to him. If anything, Turati opposed the campaign in Libya with even greater firmness than he had the previous year at the Modena congress. Nevertheless, he continued to defend the right of Bissolati and Bonomi to be wrong about Libya while remaining members of the Socialist party: “I think that any ostracism of ideas or persons—today and over this disagreement—is useless, is equivocal, is dangerous.” He wanted the party “not to persecute ideas or individuals,” but to debate “concrete acts” and to let the discussion lead where it would in an open and tolerant atmosphere. “We are not a church, nor is this an ecumenical council,” Turati told the delegates. Therefore, “excommunications, the ancient arm of the Catholic Inquisition,” should not be part of the way Socialists conducted their business.²¹

Turati’s effort on behalf of Bissolati and Bonomi met with defeat. The revolutionary faction, vastly augmented as a result of the growing opposition to the war on the left, succeeded in expelling the two right-wing reformists. On the winning side at the Reggio Emilia congress, Mussolini received as his trophy the editorship of the party’s Milan-based national newspaper, *Avanti!* He was not yet 30 years old.

Revolutionary Editor

For the next two years Mussolini dominated the Socialist party from the editorial offices of *Avanti!* He immediately replaced the reformist journalists of the previous administration with revolutionary syndicalists. His Marxist guru in Switzerland, Angelica Balabanov, became his intellectual confidante on the staff. His relationship with Balabanov would deteriorate in 1913, however, when Margherita Sarfatti—another Jewish socialist intellectual but with a better figure—came on the scene in the role of mistress-mentor. From the beginning

of his editorship in Milan, he called for the moral renewal of the party as a revolutionary force. The party's "eternal conflict between idealism and utilitarianism, between faith and necessity" had to end because "humanity needs a *faith*. It is faith that moves mountains because it gives the illusion that the mountains move. Illusion is, perhaps, the only reality of life."²²

Under Mussolini *Avanti!* became the counter to *Critica Sociale*. He denounced Turati and his close ally Claudio Treves as the Judas Iscariot and Cassius of Marxist socialism. To reject class revolution, as these two reformists did, was nothing less than a call for the expulsion of Marx as the guiding force of socialism. The Marx who had called violence the midwife of history still spoke to the proletarian masses. In almost all of his writings, Marx "obstinately had recourse to the concept of revolution and violence." A surging market existed for such ideas in Italy as strikes and violent demonstrations erupted in various parts of the country. In little more than a year the circulation of *Avanti!* climbed from twenty thousand to almost one hundred thousand.²³ Mussolini was much in demand as a speaker, and requests poured in for articles and essays. Revolutionary socialists, Mussolini insisted, proposed to follow the spirit and the letter of Marx the communist activist. Either communism would be "a doctrine of will and of conquest" or it would be nothing. To Turati's rejoinders and calls for the party to return to democratic socialism, Mussolini responded that what the director of *Critica Sociale* really wanted was a return to reformism. History had foreclosed such a return because with the Libyan War Italy had entered just the kind of "revolutionary situation" that met all of Marx's requirements for a full-scale proletarian onslaught against the capitalist establishment.²⁴

In 1913 Mussolini started a new journal, *Utopia*, as a vehicle for the theoretical speculations of the revolutionary socialists. In a statement of purpose, he insisted that the review would be dedicated to the promotion and illumination of Marxism, "the most organic system of socialist doctrines." Marxism had both a historical and a living value. *Utopia* would dedicate itself to the intellectual exploration of both these values. Mussolini made plain in his statement of purpose the polemical intent of the review. He had conceived *Utopia* as another front in the war for "a revision of socialism from the revolutionary viewpoint." The bankruptcy of political reformism and the crisis of philo-

sophical positivism had created a vacuum in the left-wing culture of Europe. For twenty years, “the legalitarian and reformist method” had dominated European socialism, with “completely or largely negative results.” Not socialism, but militarism was on the march in Europe. The fundamental error of the reformists had been to think that gently and gradually they could erase the bourgeois character of the state through democratic reform. Look around, Mussolini advised his readers. Not in the least had the reformist programs changed the state, which everywhere in Europe remained “the business committee of the bourgeois class.” Socialism manifestly required the new direction that *Utopia* aspired to provide.²⁵

On 15 January 1914 Mussolini explained further what had inspired him to create *Utopia*. In a backhanded compliment to his foremost adversary in the party, he declared that he wanted his journal to serve the same cultural function that *Critica Sociale* had “in the early years when Turati was still a Marxist.” Mussolini expressed hope that *Utopia* would be instrumental in reversing the reformist-caused decline of socialism. Yet he confessed that he also had personal reasons for founding the journal. The director of *Avanti!* had to represent the collective opinion of the party. Indeed, Mussolini asserted that this collective opinion “can be and almost always is mine.” Nevertheless, he felt the need for a completely personal vehicle, one in which “my opinion, my *Weltanschauung*” could be expressed directly. Hence, *Utopia* possesses a high historical value for anyone interested in Mussolini’s thinking in the last months of the prewar period when he gave voice and leadership to the extreme left’s revolutionary aspirations.²⁶

Mussolini worried most of all about the lack of a plan for revolution. He thought that “revolutionism today is nothing but a mental position.”²⁷ No “secret insurrectionary society” existed in Italy. The country did have some “potentially” revolutionary parties, but the historic and ideological divisions among them ran so deep that Mussolini could not imagine how they ever could come together to pose a serious threat to the status quo. Things could change, though. A revolutionary “conjunction” could arise spontaneously, and he wanted the extreme left to be ready for it.

Utopia continued to reflect the broad outlines of Mussolini’s ideological interests in the months leading up to World War I. De Felice singles out one of the journal’s articles in particular as a major source

of insight into Mussolini's thinking on the eve of the war: Sergio Panunzio's "Il lato teorico e il lato pratico del socialismo," which appeared in the 15–31 May 1914 issue. Panunzio had been a leading figure among the revolutionary syndicalists. Written soon after the Socialist party congress at Ancona where Mussolini had won another major political victory over his reformist adversaries and gained the enthusiastic acknowledgment of the delegates for the technical, intellectual, and financial success he had made of *Avanti!*, Panunzio's article raised questions about the real meaning of the revolutionaries' triumph. In doing so, Panunzio went no further than Mussolini had gone in his own articles. The revolutionaries had won a tactical victory within the party, but the actual cause of revolution remained inchoate.

Panunzio did make a genuinely distinctive claim when he called for the Socialists to abandon their crusade against militarism. War alone, Panunzio argued, would create the preconditions essential for a socialist revolution in Europe. He branded antimilitarism as a conservative force. Following the reasoning of Marx on the necessity of violent revolution, Panunzio concluded that pacifism in general favors the status quo. Capitalism thrived on peace. A general European war would test capitalism and bring to the fore subversive human emotions and desires. Panunzio's critique of Socialist pacifism did not have an immediate effect on Mussolini, at least outwardly. In his own writing, he continued to follow the standard antiwar line of the Socialists.

Revolution against the state, however, was another matter entirely. Always on the lookout for revolutionary signs and portents, Mussolini thrilled to the widespread eruption of violence known as Red Week. Revolutionary syndicalists, anarchists, and radical Republicans had chosen Ancona as the main staging ground for a resumption of agitation against the State. On 7 June soldiers killed three demonstrators and wounded fifteen others. A general strike in protest against this violence followed, causing the imposition of martial law. Protest demonstrations then erupted all over Italy, followed by open revolts against the authorities in some localities. Barricades went up in Rome and in other cities. In Milan, Mussolini helped to organize demonstrations. Throughout the week-long period of widespread disorders, the main center of antigovernment activity remained the Marches and, above all, the Romagna. Many acts of violence occurred, including sabotage to railroad lines and damage to public buildings. Repeated clashes be-

tween protestors and the police left numerous dead and wounded. To restore order Prime Minister Antonio Salandra had to dispatch more than one hundred thousand troops to various parts of the country. Revolutionaries interpreted Red Week as proof of the establishment's fragility.

Mussolini commented at length in *Utopia* and *Avanti!* on Red Week. He thought it a vital event of "a decidedly revolutionary character" and a dramatic indication of the country's grave economic and political situation. Support for the status quo was very thin in the country, he thought. Moreover, Red Week had confirmed that "a revolutionary 'state of mind'" characterized the thinking of large numbers of Italians. Even the monarchy, he thought, stood at risk as a result of "the precariousness of our institutions." Mussolini did not see how the reformists could continue to maintain their thesis about the essential health and worthiness of Italy's "democracy." Red Week had made manifest what the Italian people thought about this democracy. Mussolini interpreted their violent actions to mean that "Italy needs a revolution and will have it."²⁸

Marx would be the workers' guide in their liberation from capitalism, Mussolini contended. He had been proscribed by the reformists whose ideas now "not only diverged from Marxism, but existed in 'perfect' antithesis with it." To Mussolini, Marxism entailed support for every revolutionary uprising against the social, economic, and political conditions imposed by capitalism. Such an uprising had been Red Week. He contrasted the responses of the reformists and the revolutionaries to this event, which more than any other of recent times illuminated "the psychological and doctrinal disagreement that divides the two souls of Italian socialism." The red soul of the revolutionaries had responded, in a completely Marxist way, to the uprising in Ancona. With equal completeness the pallid soul of reformism had rejected Marxism. By accepting "the aggressive, rectilinear, and violent class struggle," Mussolini claimed to be standing squarely with Marx.²⁹

No one in Italy grasped the significance of the events in Sarajevo later that month. When Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his wife Sophie fell dead from the shots fired by Gavrilo Princip, the Italians were still caught up in the aftermath of Red Week. Mussolini initially interpreted the assassinations as nothing more than the usual "explosion of national hatred" to be expected in the Balkans. Thereafter, he

followed the straight Socialist party line about the ensuing hostilities. While the major powers of Europe slid into war during the summer of 1914, *Avanti!* shrilly came out against Italian intervention. On 26 July Mussolini called for “absolute neutrality.” “Not one man, not one lira” became his motto. Should Italy intervene in the conflict, he threatened to call a general strike.³⁰

Socialist unity on the issue of the war did not last long. The universal failure of working-class parties to have any effect on impeding the war efforts of their respective countries made a profound impression in Italy and shook the confidence of many Socialists in their party’s capacity to keep the country neutral. Then Germany’s shocking invasion of Belgium put anti-interventionists in all Italian parties morally on the defensive. The refusal to help the Belgians seemed heartless. The Socialists in particular found themselves in a serious and wholly unfamiliar dilemma, accustomed as they were to occupying the moral high ground on all issues related to war. Moreover, Socialists with irredentist longings quickly saw the advantages of intervention on the side of the Allies. Finally, Panunzio’s argument about war as the indispensable means by which the socialist revolution would be brought about also attracted some members of the party.

For more than a month after the outbreak of war, Mussolini continued to advocate a policy of strict neutrality, but he did allow a debate on intervention to take place in the pages of *Avanti!* On 12 September he published a strongly pro-war article by Panunzio, “Guerra e Socialismo.” Panunzio repeated his arguments from the previous May: peace meant the conservation of the capitalist order, war meant revolution. Mussolini wrote a rebuttal, describing the war as already one of the great disasters in human history. The only reasonable response to it was “implacable” and “unshakeable” opposition.³¹

Yet Mussolini had begun to waver. For nearly another month he continued to write antiwar editorials, though without the crisp directness and certainty of his vintage style. Then on 18 October he stunned the country with an editorial entitled “Dalla neutralità assoluta alla neutralità attiva ed operante” (From Absolute Neutrality to Active and Efficacious Neutrality). Absolute neutrality, he proclaimed, no longer served the interests of the proletariat, and indeed threatened “to bottle up the Party and to deprive it of every possibility and liberty of movement in the future.” Absolute neutrality had once had a purpose,

but not any longer: “Today it is a dangerous formula” and a “reactionary” one. The complexity of Italy’s situation required a more subtle and responsive approach than the party’s simplistic slogan of “Down with war!” would allow. He tried to argue that in a paradoxical way intervention might be the most humane strategy, bringing the slaughter to a close sooner. Who among the Socialists could honestly oppose such an ethical endeavor? He also had another question for the Socialists, and this seems to have been what he mainly had on his mind: “Do we want to be—as men and as Socialists—inert spectators of this grandiose drama?” The workers, Mussolini concluded, could not isolate themselves from the rest of the country, but had to engage in the great national debate about the war.³²

Almost everyone on the *Avanti!* editorial staff felt outraged and betrayed by Mussolini’s desertion of the anti-interventionist cause. At a party meeting the following day in Bologna, Mussolini said that he had nothing to add to his editorial. A few people sided with Mussolini, but the majority went against him. For hours he attempted to defend himself against his critics, some of whom bitterly denounced him. At length Mussolini rose and said, “If the majority does not accept my policy, from this moment I will consider myself the ex-director of *Avanti!*”³³ He would accept no compromise. Someone proposed that Mussolini take sick leave for three months, but he would not hear of this. On 21 October he resigned, protesting that no other choice remained open to him short of renouncing his principles. His old mentor in Switzerland, Giacinto Menotti Serrati, became the next editor of the newspaper.

“Il caso Mussolini” now divided Italian socialists into interventionist and non-interventionist camps. Numerous ideological, political, and personal divisions existed in both camps, but the Mussolini case caused the basic cleavage. Within a month, he had another newspaper, *Il Popolo d’Italia*. He was not alone: many *Avanti!* journalists, especially the revolutionary syndicalists, followed him into the new enterprise. Nevertheless, at a tumultuous party meeting on 24 November 1914 in Milan’s Teatro del Popolo, the Socialists expelled him. In an emotional speech, Mussolini told the thunderously jeering crowd, “Today you hate me because you love me still.” His parting words were: “Do not believe that by taking away my party membership card you will keep me from the socialist faith, that you will prevent me from working

for the cause of socialism and revolution.” The next day Mussolini published an editorial in *Il Popolo d'Italia* about his expulsion from the party. He warned the Socialists: “The Mussolini case is not finished . . . It begins. It becomes complicated. It assumes vaster proportions. I openly raise the banner of schism. I do not quiet myself, but cry out; I do not yield, but rise up.”³⁴

The War and the Founding of Fascism

Mussolini supported the war out of genuine conviction. De Felice exonerates him from the charge that he joined the interventionist cause for financial gain. The documents and the logic of the situation undercut the famous “*chi paga?*” (who is paying) thesis regarding Mussolini’s embrace of interventionism, which numerous other left-wingers supported as the best means of igniting a revolutionary conflagration.³⁵ Mussolini took money from pro-war interests, but, according to the evidence, only because they agreed with him on the war. Mussolini’s newspaper, *Il Popolo d'Italia*, became the major national vehicle for organizing the left-wing interventionist campaign. Throughout the campaign he relentlessly attacked the Socialists for their incoherence and lack of courage. The party of “neither yes nor no,” he derisively called them.³⁶ At the most critical moment in the history of Europe, the Socialists could not agree on which position they should take.

Mussolini prided himself on the clarity and logic of his position. On 10 May he told a crowd in the Piazza del Duomo of Milan, “The war that we desire and want is a war of liberty and revolution . . . it is a liberating war, it is a war of justice and humanity.” German barbarism in Belgium and on the high seas had transformed the Allied cause into a war for civilization: “We, as a civil people, cannot kill ourselves in neutrality as the false internationalists would want; but precisely in the name of the true International we must unsheathe our sword against barbarism and redeem our past and our future from the overbearing violence of the armies of the Kaiser.” In the face of such outrages, war alone could preserve the honor of civilized men.³⁷

Mussolini’s class of inductees was called up in August 1915. He saw his first action in September and spent the next eighteen months at the front. Still fervently socialist, he felt certain that the war would result in “a great Revolution,” and he wanted to be in the middle of the

action. Well into the war, Mussolini continued to justify his actions in the name of Marx. He ridiculed “the illiterate idiots” who monopolized socialism in Italy. Anyone who tried to claim Marx for pacifism simply had not read or understood him. Marx had a solidly pragmatic attitude toward war, and he judged it to be good or bad exclusively in terms of its contribution to “the social revolution.” A good war brought the social revolution nearer, a bad one impeded it; that was all.³⁸

Mussolini’s revolutionary past kept him out of the officer corps, but he gave a good account of himself as a soldier in the ranks. His superiors promoted him to corporal for battlefield courage. He eventually earned the rank of sergeant and received consistently high evaluations at the front. Then on 23 February 1917 he was gravely wounded by an exploding shell in a training exercise. Like Hitler, Mussolini became a representative exponent of the generation of 1914 on what might be called the Ernst Jünger side of the postwar debate about the ultimate meaning of World War I. In *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1929), Erich Maria Remarque presented the classic indictment of the war as a civilization-shattering tragedy for the West. About the slaughter, he wrote: “How senseless is everything that can ever be written, done or thought when such things are possible. It must all be lies and of no account when the culture of a thousand years could not prevent this stream of blood being poured out.” In *The Storm of Steel: From the Diary of a German Storm Troop Officer on the Western Front* (1920), Jünger took the opposite view. He saw the war as an expression of man’s eternally unchanging nature and in a preface to the English edition wrote: “Time only strengthens my conviction that it was a good and strenuous life, and that the war, for all its destructiveness, was an incomparable schooling of the heart.”³⁹

For men like Jünger, Hitler, and Mussolini, World War I acquired a kind of holy character, in some ways comparable to the initiation rites into a sacred mystery. There were those who knew and those who did not know.⁴⁰ The pain and trauma of war alone could impart the deeper existential lessons about the meaning of comradeship under fire and, above all, the irresistible pull in extreme situations of blood and race. War was the most extreme of all situations, and from it the real truth of things emerged. Mussolini’s personal experience as a soldier in the ranks gave him lofty standing with the veterans and particu-

larly the elite troops known as the *arditi*, who would form the inner core of his followers.

The war transformed Mussolini into a nationalist with only an overlay of socialism in his thinking, at least of the Marxist kind he had sought to promote in the prewar period. For him the key events in the war occurred in 1917: first the Russian Revolution and then Italy's disastrous defeat at Caporetto. The February Revolution cheered him. It resulted in the strengthening of Russia's war effort under the Provisional Government. Mussolini had condemned Nicholas II just prior to the revolution less for his reactionary politics than for his war weariness. He feared that the tsar would make a separate peace with the Germans. From the new government, eventually led by Alexander Kerensky, energetic action on the eastern front could be expected. Mussolini rejoiced when the Russians launched the Brusilov offensive in July. He thought that the pattern of events following the February Revolution should encourage revolutionaries everywhere: "It is the revolution that does not fear war . . . [and] the war that saves the revolution."⁴¹ His prediction in 1914 about the inevitably revolutionary consequences of the war had come true.

Lenin, however, alarmed Mussolini from the instant that news of Bolshevism arrived in Italy. He despised the Bolsheviks as "extremists at the service of Germany." They clearly represented a threat to Russia's war effort. To Mussolini the Bolsheviks were nothing but traitors, and he blamed them for the ultimate failure of the Brusilov offensive, so promisingly begun. Bad as the situation in Russia looked at the end of July, Mussolini expressed faith in Kerensky, who would "save the revolution."⁴²

In his *Popolo d'Italia* editorials, Mussolini pursued Lenin's Italian sympathizers with remorseless fury: "I leninizziati"—the Leninized—he called them. These traitors weakened "the spiritual resistance of the Nation" and would bring Italy to the same condition of chaos and helplessness to which the Bolsheviks had brought Russia. Mussolini declared on 28 September 1917 that Italy should look to the United States for a good example of how to deal with antiwar dissidents: "In matters pertaining to the war, Wilson applies systems of such illiberalism that in Italy they would never occur even to the most ferocious reactionaries." Seen from a distance, Mussolini wrote approvingly, Wilson looked to be a dictator. The United States had the good

sense to put the reds on the run. In Italy, though, the feckless government granted Russian Bolshevik representatives the right to crisscross the country, holding antiwar conferences and planting the seeds of defeatism. The Americans and Italy's other allies had the right idea. It made no sense to ask millions to fight while thousands were left free to sabotage the war effort: "It is necessary for the State to prevent when possible and to repress when necessary" pacifist subversion. On 19 October 1917, in a display of the most poignant irony, Mussolini extravagantly praised and then quoted the patriotic words of Leonida Bissolati, the man he had hounded out of the Socialist party in 1912: "As one shoots at the Austrians outside [the country], so one must shoot at those inside."⁴³

Five days later the Italian army suffered the greatest military defeat in the country's history, at Caporetto. A combined Austro-German offensive achieved a breakthrough on the Isonzo front, initiating a two-week-long retreat amidst scenes of chaos, humiliation, and despair made immortal by Ernest Hemingway in *A Farewell to Arms*. What was left of the Italian army straggled to a line behind the Piave River deep inside the national territory. The invaders came within forty kilometers of Venice. Half of Italy's effective troops were lost in the disaster, with forty thousand killed or wounded, two hundred and eighty thousand taken prisoner, and three hundred and fifty thousand missing.⁴⁴ In their flight the Italians abandoned vast stocks of war materiel to the enemy. The shock of this defeat cannot be overestimated. People committed suicide in Italy over Caporetto, and Mussolini thought about doing so. To make a terrible situation even worse, Italy did not even have a government in place at the time. Never since unification had Metternich's caustic phrase, that Italy was nothing more than a geographical expression, seemed closer to reality.

In his editorials about Caporetto, Mussolini sought to establish a connection between the country's political chaos and its military defeat. A long-time critic of parliament, he called for the immediate creation of a war government with full powers. He did not shrink from the word "dictatorship." Caporetto posed a challenge not only to the war policy of the government but to the life of the state itself. The first item of business for a war government, Mussolini counseled, should be a move to counteract "the most vile maneuvers of the defeatists." In an editorial of exceptional autobiographical candor, he admitted that up

to the outbreak of the war he had been one of the “unquiet ones, the irregulars—a little inside and a little outside the law.” He had followed “the rose-colored phantasms of proletarian cosmopolitanism,” but he claimed to have changed completely upon joining the “Fighting Nation.” With what joy had he rediscovered Italy: “Our full loyalty, our unconditioned dedication to the national cause we have consecrated with our blood.”⁴⁵

Mussolini also linked Caporetto with the Bolshevik subversion of the Kerensky government in Russia. With Kerensky forced to devote his rapidly diminishing military force to the domestic front, the Germans were able to reassign regiments to the West. Some of those regiments had participated in the Caporetto offensive. As supporters of Lenin, therefore, Italy’s Bolsheviks were traitors. Speaking at La Scala Theater in Milan on 20 November, Mussolini denounced them as the agents of a foreign power. Their victory, he declared, would mean the defeat and subjugation of the Italian people: “Death, yes, but slavery no, slavery never!” In this same speech he expressed great satisfaction over the failure of a Leninist revolution to erupt in the aftermath of Caporetto. Now all that remained for the Italians was to gain back their reputation as a people.⁴⁶

Mussolini addressed a working-class audience in Sesto San Giovanni ten days later, and by this time the balance in his mind between nationalism and socialism clearly had tipped in favor of the former. Still using the socialist language of class, he expressed a preference to be with the workers in Sesto San Giovanni because “in spite of everything I am and will always remain a man of the people who produce and work, a man implacably against every parasite.” Nevertheless, the war had proved that in the lives of men nationalism exerted a far greater influence than socialism, which he now thought of as a “beautiful chimaera.” The main lesson of 1914 came down to this: when men shouldered weapons for battle, the nation-state mattered vitally, the International not all.⁴⁷

From the Great War a new aristocracy would emerge, Mussolini wrote in one of his most important articles from this period, “Trincerocrazia.” A trenchocracy had been formed in the crucible of battle, and Mussolini predicted that when this mass of men returned home, “conscious of that which it had done, it inevitably would produce some shifts in the balance of power.” The traditional parties and

the old leaders would be overturned. "The music of tomorrow will have another tempo," Mussolini thought. Liberalism and socialism would not retain their prewar meanings. As for socialism, it could be "anti-Marxist, for example, and national."⁴⁸ Here Mussolini gave succinct and credible expression to the link between his socialist past and his fascist future. He claimed not to have invented the ideology of fascism through an intellectualistic synthesis of the concepts of class and nation, but to have discovered it at the front. Fascism would long remain a very confused and contradictory ensemble of ideas and political impulses, but the secret of its initial appeal lay in the skill with which Mussolini created and interpreted the myth of the trenches. Not for nothing had he studied and absorbed the lessons of Georges Sorel. No political cause can become or remain great without a sustaining myth, and from the beginning fascism had one. It took a while for Mussolini to figure out how to translate the myth into a political program and ideology. When he did, such was the terrible traumatizing power of World War I harnessed in fascism that his adversaries went down without knowing what hit them.

From August 1918 on, Mussolini identified himself as a "post-Socialist."⁴⁹ He did not say what this new label meant, only that a man of intelligence could not be the same thing all his life; such a man had to grow. This is probably the best way to think about nascent fascism, as a kind of project in progress that the issues and the political possibilities of the day, along with the war-stamped sensibilities of Mussolini, combined to define. Ideas were a part of the process, too, but the documents do not warrant the thesis that from the beginning fascism existed as a completely coherent ideology.⁵⁰ It is not at all clear in Mussolini's postwar writings and speeches that he thought about ideological matters with clarity and definiteness. Mussolini merely said that he felt freer upon abandoning socialism: "Free to be myself sometimes, only myself, nothing but myself."⁵¹ He seems to have been starting out at this time on a journey of discovery, not on a preordained mission.

Mussolini's floridly expressed admiration of Wilsonism in late 1918 and early 1919 indicates just how far away he was at this time from having a settled ideology that can be identified in any meaningful way as fascist or even proto-fascist. In October 1918 he wrote that, when President Wilson spoke, "we Europeans feel ourselves transported to another realm." He hailed Wilson as "the new Moses who is descending

from the Sinai of Washington with the tablets of a new universal law.” These encomiums gave way to accusations of betrayal when Wilson voiced his opposition to Italy’s quest for the Adriatic city of Fiume. The American Moses, Mussolini then declared, perhaps had been overpraised. By April 1919 Mussolini would be calling Wilsonian idealism a false hope, one driven by international finance: “Is it the idealism of business or the business of idealism?” Wilson had deceived the Italians, and Mussolini would view him increasingly as a hypocrite who possessed an extraordinary talent for coating the most sordid maneuvers of Anglo-Saxon greed with a bromidic glaze. Cynicism dressed up to look like idealism could take in the professors and humanitarians of certain mooncalf nations, but not the people who had produced Machiavelli.⁵²

Humiliated at Versailles by Wilson, the Italians suffered a series of economic and political shocks as well. Panic set in as inflation and unemployment rose precipitously. The long-regnant Liberal party floundered in the face of surging mass movements, and chaos threatened to engulf the country as one ministry after another fell. This was the revolutionary conjunction for which Mussolini ardently had wished at the start of the war. An ideal situation now existed for a party to come forward with an agenda regarding the redress of nationalist grievances, and he did not miss his cue.

Mussolini founded the *Fasci di Combattimento* (Fighting Leagues) on 23 March 1919. He spoke that morning to an assembly of interventionists who had gathered at the headquarters of the Industrial and Commercial Alliance in Milan’s Piazza San Sepolcro. Mussolini began by paying tribute to the casualties of the war, especially the dead—“this marvelous youth that went to the front and now remains there.” Italy was a greater country for their sacrifices. If Italy had not chosen the path of war, which could have been avoided, “today we would be the last people of the world.” Instead, like all the other victorious powers, the Italians stood poised to move forward in the direction of political and economic democracy.⁵³

The Wilsonian liberals and the Bolsheviks stood in the way of Italy’s healthy development as a sovereign nation. The first group wanted to deprive Italy of its just reward as a victor in the war. Mussolini scorned the moralistic arguments of liberal leaders like Wilson. Now that the world had been arranged for the ease and comfort of their powerful

imperialist countries, they naturally preached a message of selfless idealism to proletarian nations like Italy “in order to fix and to perpetuate for all time the conditions of the status quo.”⁵⁴ The second group Mussolini denounced as a scourge upon the world. In the Italian Socialist party he identified the subservient ally of the Bolsheviks and in the Italian Liberal party their stupidly unaware accomplice. Fascism alone had the strength and the understanding to protect Italy from the horrors then engulfing Russia.

Yet on this historic day, Mussolini repeatedly asserted that fascism would bring revolution to Italy. “If the bourgeoisie thinks to find in us a lightning rod, it deceives itself,” the old socialist insisted. The fascists stood for “economic democracy,” universal suffrage—for women as well as for men—and a republic. Mussolini conceded that his proposals bore a certain similarity to the Socialist program on some issues. In spirit, though, he thought that socialism and fascism inhabited different realms: the first criminal in its mad addiction to Bolshevism, the second animated to patriotic purpose by the faith it had found in victory at the front. “Therefore,” he concluded, “let us create fasci, these organs of creation and agitation capable of descending into the public square to shout ‘We are the ones who have the right to succession because we were the ones who pushed the country into war and led it to victory.’”⁵⁵

Fascism’s socialist heredity became increasingly recessive. Mussolini, from genuine intellectual conviction as well as from political motives and their consequent financial exigencies, made his way toward an accommodation with the right. The newspaper and the movement had to be financed, and Mussolini soon encountered like-minded industrialists who sped him on his way toward the ultimate destination of fascism. Mussolini was not the lowest kind of opportunist who simply seeks to advance himself, as his enemies charged. He wanted to do that, but at the same time he was trying to make sense of a fluid situation in which none of the prewar political rules applied. In this hard school, he developed an impressive instinct for what was possible in a given political situation. As long as this instinct remained keen, he thrived in Italian politics as no one before him or since.

The postwar political season, however, began inauspiciously for the Fascists when they suffered a seemingly annihilating defeat in the November 1919 parliamentary elections. Nowhere did they fare well, and

even in Milan they received only 4,657 votes out of 270,000 cast; the Socialists and the Catholic Popolari, by comparison, received 170,000 and 74,000 respectively.⁵⁶ The Fascists elected only one member to parliament. Such a thumping repudiation appeared to finish off Mussolini as a political figure. Subscriptions to *Il Popolo d'Italia* plummeted, and Mussolini thought seriously about emigrating. Yet the very size of the Socialist victory alarmed the establishment, whose representatives began to cast about for a countervailing force. The monarchy, the landowners, the industrialists, and the Catholic Church could imagine nothing worse than socialism, and in these terrified constituencies Mussolini would find the support that would bring him to power.

The political establishment confidently expected to use fascism for its own ends, but the leaders of its diverse elements proved to be no match for Mussolini, whose shrewdness and unscrupulousness put him in a class of his own. His political adversaries and interlocutors suffered from the fatal disadvantage of not understanding what they were dealing with in fascism, whereas he understood the political situation and every party's place in it with the fearsome lucidity of the genuinely talented tactician who lives for politics. The radically innovative character of fascism—not only in mobilizing the masses for right-wing causes, but even more in its inclination on a scale never seen before in Italian politics to use violence to impose its will—caught all of Mussolini's opponents and would-be senior partners off guard.

The prewar *enfant terrible* of revolutionary socialism rebounded from every defeat and scandal of the postwar period—and there were plenty of both—to ultimate victory.⁵⁷ Mussolini became the mouthpiece of the bourgeoisie, the protector of the landowners, the patriotic advocate of the monarchy, and the willing political partner of the Catholic Church. At the same time, he continued to proclaim fascism's revolutionary character, albeit on an increasingly abstract level, to his followers. The combination of revolutionary rhetoric and antirevolutionary force made Mussolini's political triumph one of the most original in history. Through a combination of unsurpassed tactical cunning, outstanding intellectual nimbleness, and indisputable personal charisma he became the master of Italy.

De Felice relates what he acknowledges as a wholly undocumented story about Lenin, who after the war is said to have remarked that the

Italian Socialists allowed to get away the one man with the capacity to make a revolution in Italy: Mussolini. In other words, Mussolini could have been the Italian Lenin. In a sense, he was. He cannot be said to have been the Italian Lenin ideologically. He had nothing like Lenin's lengthy résumé of Marxist tomes. Yet from 1912 to 1914 he had been the Italian Lenin politically. He had staked out the most extreme antireformist positions in Italian politics and had reduced Marxism to its revolutionary essence. De Felice quite accurately notes that many of Mussolini's positions during these years anticipated Lenin's.⁵⁸

In the postwar period, the Marxist revolutionaries would define their beliefs in response to Fascism and Bolshevism. Mussolini's transformation from the extreme left's Prince Valiant to the Black Prince of Fascism would have a decisive impact on the subsequent development of the Marxist revolutionary tradition. On an even grander scale, Lenin became for Italy's Marxists the kind of heroic figure Mussolini had been before the war. As the artificer of revolution, he was everything for them that Mussolini should have been.

Amadeo Bordiga: The Revolutionary as Anti-Realpolitiker

We do not at all differ with the anarchists on the question of the abolition of the state as the *aim*.

—Lenin, *The State and Revolution*

Lenin had taken advantage of the chaos following the failed Brusilov offensive of July 1917 to spearhead the Bolshevik Revolution. Thinking that the revolution in Europe would follow the same course as the one in Russia, Lenin had founded the Third International in March 1919 as a means of extending Soviet influence over all the world's socialist parties. As the architects of the first successful socialist revolution in history, the Bolsheviks enjoyed an unrivaled prestige among Marxists everywhere. Fidelity to the Third International authenticated the Leninist credentials of European radicals during the postwar period. In Italy, two men stood out as the foremost Leninists of the day: Amadeo Bordiga and Antonio Gramsci. They both thought that for a socialist revolution to be successful in Italy, Italian socialists would have to master the lessons of the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia. The different ways in which Bordiga and Gramsci interpreted those lessons and sought to implement them shaped the Marxist revolutionary tradition in postwar Italy.

Bordiga had a somewhat peculiar background for the historic role he played. Born near Naples in 1889, he grew up in a progressive democratic home. His father, Oreste, was a Piedmontese by origin and a professor of agricultural economy in Naples. His mother, Zaira degli Amadei, was of the nobility. They named their son Amadeo in honor of the mother's aristocratic caste.¹ He discovered Marxism in his high school philosophy class, and this system at once and forever explained

the world and all human history to him. Bordiga embarked on a precocious and enthusiastic reading of the Marxist classics. A gifted mathematics student, he took a degree in engineering at the University of Naples and would go on to a career in that field. While at the university he became a radical student leader, a prolific contributor to left-wing journals, and an avid supporter of Mussolini's radical socialism.

Bordiga's earliest writings reveal his interest in the Southern Question. He wrote knowledgeably and with passion about his native region, striking a moral tone reminiscent of that found in the works of the great nineteenth-century *meridionalisti*. In one of his first articles, Bordiga explained the South's backwardness in terms of the unnatural survival into the modern era of premodern economic institutions and practices. The disastrous effects of the southern way of life on the physical and psychological health of the population were too well established and widely known to require further documentation. He noted the absence of "a spirit of initiative and association" in the South. Each peasant was terribly alone as he struggled to survive in socioeconomic conditions that had remained essentially unchanged since the Middle Ages.²

Only Marxist methods, Bordiga thought, could lead to an authentic understanding of the Southern Question. He reasoned that although the South languished in backwardness, it constituted an important part of Italy's capitalist order. A northern-industrial, southern-agricultural condominium ruled Italy. The northern capitalists had greater power and wealth than the southern landowners, but the system could function only if both ruling classes worked together. One of the consequences of their tragic misrule was the perpetuation of medieval socioeconomic conditions in the South. The economic well-being of the establishment in the North and the South depended on the availability of cheap peasant labor. So long as the capitalist system prevailed, the southern masses would remain ignorant and exploited slaves. The system itself, not just its visible defects, had to go, and Marxist theory showed the way.

While deeply interested in Marxism for its own sake, Bordiga pursued his theoretical interests largely in connection with the great issues of the day. He read Marx assiduously and quoted him often in his strongly practical issues-oriented articles for various socialist publications. He vehemently protested against the Libyan and Balkans Wars as

capitalist plots. The pervasive influence of the Masons in Italian political life outraged him. Local Neapolitan politics also preoccupied the young engineering student, and he wrote many articles about the city, including some for Mussolini's *Avanti!* and *Utopia*. Still a university student at the outset of this collaboration, Bordiga valued "comrade Mussolini" as a genuine revolutionary. The two men developed a warm friendship.³

For *Utopia*, Bordiga wrote a long article early in 1914 entitled "Socialism in Naples and the South." He began by praising Mussolini's journal for being "the voice and expression of the most advanced and warlike part of our party." The problem with socialism in the South arose from "the decidedly abnormal" socioeconomic conditions of the region. Bad as these conditions were, they did not explain by themselves the dismal performance of the Socialist party there. Bordiga faulted Socialist leaders for pursuing a reformist strategy of coalition politics with so-called like-minded parties. In effect, these leaders had abandoned socialism and had erased the distinctive ideological contours of their party. Marxism had nothing to do with such a strategy. Without Marxism as a core value system, socialism had no message and no reason for being.⁴

With the Socialist party of no consequence in the South, Bordiga and other young Neapolitan radicals—including his future wife, Ortensia De Meo—had founded their own revolutionary socialist association, the Karl Marx Circle. One of Bordiga's leading biographers, Andreina De Clementi, calls the founding of the Karl Marx Circle "the truly constitutive act of the Neapolitan Marxist left." They began as a Marxist study group with a mission to reinvigorate southern socialism and looked to Mussolini as the supreme hope of the party.⁵ From the beginning of its history the Karl Marx Circle waged a campaign of ideological purity against the reformist compromises of the official Neapolitan section of the Socialist party.

The main thrust of Bordiga's Marxism, which remained remarkably consistent throughout his active political career, clearly emerged from the dozens of articles he wrote between 1911 and 1914. He stood by revolution as the most basic of his Marxist convictions: "We believe in revolution, not as the Catholic Church believes in Christ, but as the mathematician in the results of his research," he wrote in a 1912 article entitled "Socialist Idealism." Revolution was the ideal state to which

every Marxist aspired under capitalism. The world had to be changed, not merely understood. Marx's entire philosophy and all of Marxist politics flowed from this point, Bordiga believed. He hailed Mussolini as the only national leader who understood these Marxist truths and acted on them. No one else in the party seemed to grasp that the mission of socialism consisted entirely of coordinating toward "its ultimate ends" the defense of the proletariat against capitalist exploitation.⁶

Bordiga characterized Mussolini as the revolutionary Marxist golden mean between reformism and syndicalism.⁷ The reformists, gathered around Turati's *Critica Sociale*, he simply dismissed as class traitors who understood nothing of Marx or socialism: "The fundamental, unpardonable error of the reformists arises from their having made the workers believe that the small, highly limited improvements obtained by them represented something stable, definitively acquired, something that represents an *end*, not only a means." The syndicalists, too, had failed to get very much out of reading Marx, but at least they recognized the value of revolution in principle. They erred irrecoverably, however, in their insistence that "the labor union was sufficient for everything." Marx clearly had assigned this role to the dictatorship of the proletariat whose agent was the Communist party. Bordiga vehemently denounced Arturo Labriola, "the restless Neapolitan professor," not only for his immoral support of the Libyan War and subsequent wallowing in local coalition politics between the Socialists and various other parties, but also and above all for his complete misconstrual of Marx during his revolutionary syndicalist heyday. Labriola had become even more confused after the breakup of the syndicalist movement: "In Labriola the deputy and the journalist had killed the sociologist and social scientist." Bordiga thought that Labriola had deteriorated into a pathetic caricature of his younger self.⁸

In his interpretation of Marxism, Bordiga presented himself as a fundamentalist who sought to apply the principles of canonical Marxism directly to the Italian scene: "The socialist movement is undoubtedly a movement of preparation—because socialism is essentially the preparation of a new social order, more, the preparation of some individuals for the *necessary* transformation of society—but it is absurd to arrive at this preparation with scholastic methods; indeed it is necessary to find the sources of such an educative preparation in *action*." He

made a name for himself in the prewar period as a strong opponent of cultural interpretations of Marxism. In resisting all those who thought that through the proper schooling or conditioning of the proletariat socialism would achieve victory, Bordiga appealed to the authority of Marx, who had stressed the importance of economic forces in bringing about revolution. Culture or thoughts about culture did not determine the outcome of history, and such a thesis expressly contradicted the principles of historical materialism: “In reality the great social crises are caused by profound shifts coming to pass in the forms of production with which the political and social systems are no longer in harmony.” Bordiga argued that “the intellectual development of the worker is the direct consequence of his economic state.” Hegemonies—and he used this word—came and went on the basis of economics, not culture.⁹

Bordiga had another and more practical criticism of those Marxists, reformists mainly, who wanted to wage a culture war against capitalism: the proletariat could not win it. Such a strategy was hopeless from the start because the bourgeoisie controlled all the main outlets of culture, most significantly school instruction, which took place under the auspices of the capitalist status quo. Bordiga thought that the bourgeoisie had the culture war well in hand. Indeed, he feared the erosion of working-class solidarity as a result of the relentless onslaught of the dominant middle-class culture. Socialists needed to combat bourgeois propaganda with “a system of general views” (*un sistema di vedute generali*) of their own, but Bordiga worried about the danger that an excessively philosophical approach to Marxism might bring.¹⁰ Marxists had to be men of action intent on changing the world, not mere philosophers content to interpret it.

He who is not with us is against us, Bordiga used to like to say, and he would have none of the notion that either politics or philosophy could be neutral or objective. Politics was not a search for truth but a defense of positions determined by a person’s place in the class structure of society. Marx had shown the class biases of philosophy, which was not an independent procedure at all and always stood at the ready, as religion did in a different way, to serve the interests of the dominant class. Philosophers, too, became caught up in the class struggle, and their work could be reduced to its political character. In a feat of philosophical acrobatics of his own, Bordiga reasoned that thanks to Marx

socialism had achieved the condition of science and now existed in a state of independence from philosophy and its “criticism,” which could always be shown to be motivated by class consciousness or some other bias. Bordiga characterized all bourgeois thought and culture as “a colossal structure of lies against which we oppose the great lever of truth.”¹¹

Bordiga did not spare bourgeois science either. As a man of science by training, he had the advantage of the insider in attacking the intellectual pretensions of the scientific establishment. The modern mystique of “the superiority of the scientific world” made a pair in his mind with that of the church a thousand years ago: “The decisions of the academies today are believed to be unassailable, as in the Middle Ages with those of the sacristies.” Bordiga countered that modern science had become completely corrupted. No less than the priests and the philosophers, the scientists had taken the emoluments that capitalism bestowed upon its loyal retainers. He sneered at the notion that scientists worked as independent seekers of the truth. It would require a book “to expose even slightly the miserable and profit-seeking behind-the-scenes realities of science! The most irresponsible dilettantism, the most audacious swindles, the most vile acts of arrogance by dominant minorities easily obtain the scientific imprimatur.” Bordiga wondered how much scientific research on behalf of humanity as a whole had been blocked, subverted, or ignored because of the threat it posed to the interests of business monopolies. Bourgeois science, epitomized in his mind by the egregious research of the “jailer-engineer” and efficiency expert Frederick Taylor, served, strengthened, and enriched the capitalist establishment at the expense of the masses. Real science, of the Marxist kind, “cannot breathe in this atmosphere of lies.”¹²

A rising star on the radical left, Bordiga made his national speaking debut at the Socialist party congress in Ancona on 28 April 1914. He opened his remarks by praising Mussolini as the most reliable authority in the party on “the essentially revolutionary viewpoint” in general. Bordiga only claimed to have some additional information to report about “*those special conditions* of the South.” Everyone knew about the conditions themselves, but he proposed to discuss the best way of dealing with them politically in a Marxist way. He began with the three most obvious of the relevant facts about the South’s backwardness.

First, “a proletariat in the Marxist sense of the word” did not exist there. Second, the socially undeveloped southern bourgeoisie functioned as the North’s overseer in the region. Finally, “it is precisely on the political incoherence of the electoral masses in the South that the Italian bourgeoisie establishes its class dominion.”¹³

Bordiga urged the party delegates to push for “a systematic tactic of struggle against the bourgeoisie!” Pressure should be brought to bear on the whole system with the aim of causing it to collapse as quickly as possible. The system could not be fixed, and Bordiga thought it a complete waste of time to engage in the kind of reform coalition politics practiced by the southern leaders of the Socialist party. They wanted to promote a politics of clean government, which he dismissed as a contradiction in terms under capitalism. The reformists made much of their progressive crusade to expose the scandals of dishonest public officials, but Bordiga observed that every bourgeois is a thief, whether legally honest or not, and every act of a capitalist government is a scandal by the very nature of the exploitation that drives the whole system. Inevitably, reformist “*moralizzazione*” resulted in the tendency to downplay the only factor that gave socialism its distinctive identity on the left: the class struggle. The Socialists should lead from their unique strength in Marxism “against the greatest camorra” of them all, Liberal Italy.¹⁴

The widespread eruption of violence during Red Week a little more than a month later affected Naples, but until the end of July Bordiga continued to devote most of his literary energy to the local political issues that long had concerned him. As the editor of *Il Socialista*—one of the most extreme left-wing newspapers of the period—he attacked *blocchismo*, or the left-wing coalition politics that “deny, kill, [and] arrest the propaganda for class struggle.” Not with democracy, which was only the political mask of capitalist exploitation all over the Western world, but with socialism could “the light of the sun be brought to many millions of human beings sucked dry by the exploitation of him who builds his nest in the great mansions and sumptuous buildings of the residential quarters where modern governments lavish millions and billions.”¹⁵ Socialism, Bordiga incessantly worried, lost credibility in the eyes of the workers because of *blocchismo*. They no longer knew how to differentiate socialism from generic progressivism, and party membership had begun to decline. Unless something

drastic happened soon, the European status quo of 1914 might go on forever. An event of the magnitude wished for by Bordiga already had happened the previous month in Sarajevo, but only with the roar of the guns of August did the consequences of Archduke Franz Ferdinand's assassination begin to become apparent.

The First World War

Bordiga began to comment on the war in late July, when it still appeared that the fighting might be confined to Austria and Serbia. Even then, he sensed the potential for a general conflagration in Europe. Should the war spread, it would be the result of "the greedy ambition of the dominant classes and the immoderate and irresistible appetites of bourgeois capitalism in all the nations. A week later he exclaimed that his worst fears had come true: the enormous armies of Europe were "on the march toward the scene of imminent slaughters." The ensuing horrors would be the consequence of capitalist militarism, he charged. In what would become a refrain in Bordiga's antiwar articles for *Il Socialista*, he celebrated socialism as the only means by which Europe could redeem itself.¹⁶

Bordiga devoted himself to keeping Italy out of war. It seemed obvious to him that because capitalists wanted to intervene, the proletariat should stay out of it. Politics and finance motivated the capitalist decision for war. Politically, the war would fan the flames of nationalism, ever a useful ploy with which to distract the masses from the class struggle. Financially, the war had come about as a result of the quarrel over capitalist profits and markets. Proletarians had no business becoming cannon fodder for the further enrichment of the tycoons and their minions, which is exactly how Bordiga thought about politicians and generals. From the outset of the war, he feared that economic pressures would undermine the nation's resolve for neutrality.

Bordiga professed to be unsurprised by the large number of republicans and democrats who immediately began to yell for Italian intervention on the side of democratic France and Great Britain. He dryly observed, "We have known Italian democracy for some time, and we remember the excitement over the Libyan War." The inclusion of tsarist Russia in the Triple Entente posed a serious problem for these interventionists, but they got around it by talking only about the French

and the British. Bordiga wrote mockingly about the interventionists' professions of democratic solidarity with these two peoples, particularly the British. He could detect very little substantive difference between German and British capitalism. Moreover, Britain's vaunted parliamentary institutions had not prevented that country from becoming a byword all over the world for imperialist exploitation. The record of "perfidious Albion" in observing the democratic rights of people in Ireland and India possibly might not match the sanctimonious propaganda claims of the interventionists about the moral superiority of the Anglo-Saxons. Bordiga also dismissed as interventionist distortions claims about German barbarism in Belgium. He did not doubt for a moment that atrocities had occurred there, but anyone who observed the British and the French armies, or any army for that matter, would quickly discover how limited was the capacity for good of armed men in the mass under wartime conditions. War brutalized all men "under every sky."¹⁷

The large number of Socialists who came out in support of the war did surprise Bordiga. A few Socialists had supported the Libyan War, but they had been isolated within the party and eventually expelled. The current situation was much different. Large numbers of Socialists declared their willingness to fight a war of national defense. Bordiga interpreted this declaration as the entering wedge for militarism in the Socialist party itself. He queried, Did not everyone in the war think he was fighting a war of national defense? It would be a severely inept propagandist who could not make a case of national defense for any armed action. People merely had to be coaxed into seeing the big picture. Then they would understand why Italian troops had to fight even though Austria posed no danger at all to Italy's borders. "The danger now," Bordiga warned, "is that the Socialist leaders are blinded and will betray the proletariat."¹⁸

Mussolini's vacillating editorials reflected the confusions of the Socialist party during the first months of the war. *Avanti!* opposed intervention, but not with the fiery intransigence Mussolini had exhibited at the outbreak of the Libyan War. Reading *Avanti!* Bordiga complained that "the Party is a little lost like a ship without a helmsman." Worse, in a speech in Milan on 9 September, Mussolini acknowledged his sympathy for France. He said that a Triple Entente victory would be the most desirable outcome of the war. Commenting on this

speech, Bordiga professed to be a “sincere friend and, if you like, ‘admirer’ of Mussolini.” Nevertheless, Mussolini’s shortcomings in this crisis illustrated the dangers of having “idols in the party.”¹⁹

For the next month Mussolini continued to waver, with Bordiga hanging on every “clarification” of *Avanti*’s position on intervention. Some days the newspaper gave him hope that it “will be now, as always, our battle flag.” Mussolini’s final clarification, however, put him in the interventionist camp. To his fateful “neutralità attiva ed operante” (active and efficacious neutrality), Bordiga opposed “l’antimilitarismo attivo ed operante” (active and efficacious antimilitarism). Bordiga trembled at “the terrible *revision* proposed by the heretical and restless intelligence of Mussolini.” He could not then guess where Mussolini’s terrible revision would lead.²⁰

Bordiga sought to preserve his relationship with Mussolini. With Mussolini’s resignation as the editor of *Avanti!* he felt a disabling sadness: “In this moment of unhappy separation for all, we can only send our deeply felt salutation to Benito Mussolini, expressing the sentiments of all socialists.” His definitive rupture with Mussolini came over the founding of *Il Popolo d’Italia* three weeks later. He felt “the deepest sorrow” upon hearing about Mussolini’s fledgling newspaper. Thereafter, Bordiga viewed Mussolini as an enemy and strongly endorsed his expulsion from the Socialist party. He urged all Socialists to “*boycott the newspaper of Mussolini.*”²¹

Bordiga described Mussolini’s attempt to combine nationalism and socialism as nothing but a “*betrayal* of the Socialist party in the face of the enemy!” Genuine Socialists belonged “instead to the party of open civil discord, of the proclaimed class struggle, and to take socialism outside this camp, under borrowed pretexts from the enemy is to kill [socialism].” Bordiga predicted that the coupling of nationalism with socialism would result in the subsumption of the second into the first with politically reactionary results. To Mussolini’s justification for intervention as an obligatory war of national defense (“*la teoria mussoliniana*”) Bordiga responded, “One can securely conclude that the least felicitous, least Marxist, least socialist solution to the problem of the relationship between socialism and nationality is vulgarly expressed in the phrase ‘national defense.’”²²

Bordiga continued his fight from the editorial offices of *Il Socialista* to keep Italy out of the war. He moved quickly to the forefront of the

revolutionary left. Marxists were not pacifists, he proclaimed: “We are supporters of violence,” but of the kind that would break the chains of capitalism. Although he opposed this capitalist war, the principle of revolutionary proletarian violence remained “sacred” to him. Marxist theory alone credibly distinguished good violence from bad.²³

When Italy entered the war in May 1915, Bordiga thought that not a single word of the official government explanation was true. The authorities appealed to “national solidarity in the name of the imperiled country,” but they failed to spell out the exact nature and sources of the peril, he wrote in the final issue of *Il Socialista* on 22 May 1915.²⁴ In numerous articles during the war, Bordiga offered to give these authorities a little help. The Italian people stood in no danger from the Austrian or German people. The financial elites of these countries had real or imagined quarrels with each other, the outcome of which would not improve the lives of the masses anywhere. The vilest propaganda campaigns masked the real economic issues of the war with the pleasing public face of high principle and moral uplift. Concealed in the rhetoric of idealism was the need of the bourgeois world for profit, scapegoats, and red herrings. Anything would do, so long as it kept the proletariat from looking at the real cause of the world’s ills: the class system. Bordiga thought Marx a far more reliable guide than government leaders for an understanding of the war’s causes and aims.

Bordiga served in the army, but he never stopped protesting against the war. When one thinks of the incarceration of Bertrand Russell and other pacifists in England, Bordiga’s freedom to express himself in wartime Liberal Italy seems quite remarkable. During the war Bordiga briefly edited another left-wing publication, *L’Avanguardia*, in which he described the terrorist assassination of the Austrian prime minister, Count Karl von Stürgkh, as a sacred revolutionary act worthy of emulation by all European revolutionaries. He praised the assassin, the extreme left-wing journalist Friedrich Adler, for his courageous deed. “Our comrade,” Bordiga called Adler: “His act has been the corollary of his—of our—internationalist campaign.” Bordiga insisted that the Stürgkh assassination belonged in the category of good Marxist violence. Adler for years had fought the good fight against capitalism, and “when the time seemed right to him, serene and decisive, after having completed his copy for the day, he emptied a pistol into the heart of the Monster, the bourgeois and imperial State.” “Friedrich

Adler is ours,” Bordiga boasted. The word “terrorism” did not apply in this case: “If ever—all rhetoric aside—the end of an apostle had the comforts of faith, Friedrich Adler . . . will die secure in the vision of the great avenger for which too many martyrs await: Revolution.” Bordiga hoped that the elimination of Stürgkh would be the signal “for the proletarian insurrection that would lead to the triumph of the International.” Socialists, he wrote seven months later, must take the offensive *“in inciting the proletariat to make itself conscious of its strength and to provoke with its intransigent class action the immediate cessation of hostilities, trying to turn the crisis toward the revolutionary aims of socialism.”*²⁵

The entry of the United States into the war on the side of the Allies in April 1917 sent a sirocco of democratic rhetoric blowing across Italy, Bordiga complained. He hated Wilson as an insufferable moralist. Bordiga viewed Wilsonism as a weird and typically American mixture of moralistic nonsense and realpolitik in the service of the country’s business interests. He gave Wilson credit for being sincere, in the American manner, about making the world safe for democracy. The American president, however, had obscured the true meaning of his policy. Democracy, as Wilson used the term, did not mean equality. It meant preserving the capitalist status quo, the profit motive, private property, and huge disparities in wealth between the classes. It also meant militarism, which Bordiga thought flourished in democracies as in no other kind of regime. He worried deeply about the ultimate consequences for mankind in a world made safe for democracy American style. Such a world would be run by and for the dominant bourgeois interests.²⁶

The Bolshevik Revolution

Bordiga wanted to live in a socialist world, and the eruption of the Bolshevik Revolution in October 1917 could not have been more momentous to him had it been announced by a blast from Gabriel’s trumpet. The triumph of the Bolsheviks translated his dreams about Marxist revolution into reality. In a long four-part article, written in October, November, and December 1917, he analyzed the Bolshevik Revolution through the lens of “socialist criticism, which represents the most felicitous and secure method of employing human reason.” He attributed the success of the revolution mainly to one factor:

“A strong Marxist socialist party—perhaps the most orthodox in the world—had formed itself in Russia.” The Bolsheviks had preserved the true revolutionary word, and when their moment came they were ready. “As we write,” Bordiga concluded, “it seems that the socialists are working to actualize a program along lines simple and grandiose—the same as that of *The Communist Manifesto*—that is to say, the expropriation of the private holders of the means of production, while proceeding logically and consequently to liquidate the war.” All revolutionaries could look to the example of Lenin with profit.²⁷

Bordiga championed Lenin against his critics in Italy. He blamed the bourgeois press for misrepresenting the Bolshevik Revolution as an orgy of violence. The chaos, Bordiga rejoined, was not in the revolution but in the reporting of it by the newspapers. In fact, “a great experiment is underway in Russia,” one that would enable men to decide the future course of the planet. By holding fast to “the most rigid intransigence in the face of the bourgeois parties,” the Bolsheviks had bested all of their adversaries and taken power. Despite all the lamentations of reformist and anarchist critics about the dictatorship of the proletariat, Bordiga hailed it as “the conscious class affirmation of the Russian proletariat.” The key to the entire Bolshevik system was the soviet, which in Russia had evolved as a political entity, not a mere labor union; therefore, it had nothing whatsoever to do with the revolutionary syndicalism Bordiga relentlessly denigrated. The proletarians themselves determined membership in the Congress of Soviets, “which followed and controlled everything.” The Bolsheviks did have to employ violence in this transitional stage from capitalism to socialism, but their necessarily ruthless measures would lead to “genuine equality and to the complete social liberty of the individual.” Posterity would look upon the Bolsheviks as world historical heroes who had secured the fruits of socialism for all humanity.²⁸

Bordiga credited the Bolsheviks with an insight that had escaped Marx and Engels. Although the two founders of scientific socialism had undermined all bourgeois ideologies and gave no support to reformism, “they still attributed excessive importance to *democracy*, and they believed universal suffrage to result in benefits [since] discredited.” The Bolsheviks completed Marx by supplying from experience the tactics about which he could only theorize. At the same time, the Bolshevik Revolution laid to rest the anarchist theory that with the top-

pling of the repressive state nothing more need be done to guarantee the successful implementation of socialism. The experience in Russia showed that the workers needed a strong party to lead them to power and a strong state afterward to preserve the revolution. Despite everything said in the bourgeois press against Bolshevik “excesses,” Bordiga thrilled to the latest news from Russia. He likened the exploits of the Bolsheviks to “streaks of the clearest light in the deepest darkness.” All socialists who had kept the revolutionary faith through the terrible trials of the war “today can see with an indescribable joy the eastern rays of this radiant dawn.”²⁹

Bordiga asserted that the Bolsheviks had charted the path to the future, and he urged the Italian Socialist party to follow them. The Bolshevik Revolution had pierced “the magic circle” of extreme capitalist evil around war-ravaged Europe. To take advantage of this breakthrough, Italian Socialists first would have to purify themselves of all semisocialist and antisocialist elements. Russian history, as well as the history of the Italian Socialist party, showed that “with every measure of *restriction* in the field of socialist tactics there has followed a notable reflowering of the movement.” The revolution needed dedicated Marxists “in the most exalted and comprehensive sense of the word.” All would be well in Italy, Bordiga thought, if the Socialist party would reject reformism and embrace Bolshevism. He envisaged a new International of purely Marxist socialist parties having nothing to do with class collaboration, “a collective organization of the working class for the violent conquest of power and its exercise.” This organization would be the embryo of “the future universal proletarian administration.”³⁰

The Struggle within the Socialist Party

On 22 December 1918 the first issue of Bordiga’s new journal, *Il Soviet*, appeared in Naples. Deeply involved in labor agitation at this time, Bordiga wanted *Il Soviet* to be the authentic voice of Leninism in Italy. It had as its chief rival for this distinction Antonio Gramsci’s *Ordine Nuovo*. *Il Soviet*, however, took the more revolutionary line of the two, proposing action “without intellectual complications or too many doubts,” in the words of Paolo Spriano, the foremost historian of the Italian Communist party.³¹ Bordiga contended that for the ac-

tualization of revolution the situation in Italy only required a good dose of Bolshevism. The same remedy would cure the ills of the rest of the world as well. Ever since a clandestine meeting of about twenty Socialist radicals in Florence on 18 November 1917 the then 26-year-old Gramsci and 28-year-old Bordiga had been party allies in pushing for a Leninist transformation of the imperialist war into a civil war of the workers against capitalism. They stood united in Florence against the more moderate radicals, led by Giacinto Menotti Serrati, who wanted revolution but counseled caution. "Tribune" Bordiga, a far more assertive and charismatic figure than Gramsci, became the leader of the extreme radicals and then the cynosure of Bolshevik revolution in postwar Italy.

At the Bologna congress in October 1919, three major factions contended for control of the Socialist party: Bordiga's communists, Serrati's maximalists, and Turati's reformists. Bordiga summed up his ideas in two speeches to the congress delegates. His goal at this time was not to break with the Socialist party but to Leninize it. "The historic hour" in which the Italian Socialists were then deciding the future of the party and the country had been struck by the Bolsheviks. With their success in establishing a dictatorship of the proletariat, a new chapter in human history had opened: the final struggle, on a worldwide scale, against capitalism. As an ideologist, Lenin had remained faithful to theoretical Marxism, and the Bolshevik experience only served "to confirm all of our ideas." Novel in Leninism was its brilliant demonstration of revolutionary methods only implicit in Marx's writings. Therein lay his genius and the reason Italian revolutionaries should follow the Bolshevik example: "We want our program of proletarian revolution to be accomplished as gloriously as Russian Bolshevism."³²

Bordiga energetically defended the Bolshevik record, which in his judgment had been distorted by the palace historians and journalists of capitalism for political reasons. "Violence," he insisted, "is of each and all." People gravely proclaimed themselves to be indignant about communist force while conveniently forgetting that "all economic and political movements adopt the method of violence." Just look at the recently concluded war, he continued. The democracies had furnished a most instructive example of their capacity for violence in the name of national self-interest. Bolshevik revolutionary violence had to be

looked at in the context of the war-torn times. When their interests were at stake revolutionaries would react as the bourgeois democracies had from 1914 to 1918. Bordiga observed that the subject of violence in all of its forms inspired very selective indignation, which suggested to him that ideological motives, not ethical concerns, determined which “horrors” would be noticed by the bourgeois press. Communist revolutionaries were not bloodthirsty maniacs: “We do not want violence for the sake of violence and insurrection for the sake of insurrection.” The historical process itself generated the forces of revolution and determined the timing of their eruption in society. Revolutionaries had to be ready for such momentous dialectical developments.³³

Bordiga called for the Italian Socialist party to engage in revolution, even to the point of exceeding Lenin’s own Third International guidelines, which permitted member parties to participate in parliamentary elections. In a sign of the independence that would always be his trademark in dealing with the Bolsheviks, Bordiga considered it a mistake even to bother with the upcoming campaigns. To arms, he cried. Attack the bourgeoisie, and the first target of the proletariat should be “the representative democratic system that must be discredited first and then destroyed.” Because of the imminence of the revolution, the party’s participation in the elections would be tantamount to “collaboration with the bourgeoisie.” Besides, it did not matter which parliamentary party won because they were all the same. He categorically dismissed the clash between liberalism and fascism as a fake. They merely were different political manifestations of the same socioeconomic forces. To attain power, Lenin had not bothered with a parliamentary strategy or sought to inflate the numbers of his followers by electioneering methods. He had been content with a small, disciplined, and ideologically coherent party. Knowing exactly what they wanted and—through Marxism—how to get it, the Bolsheviks had become masters of all Russia. There was a lesson here for Italian revolutionaries, if they had the wit to learn it.³⁴

Bordiga’s abstentionist motion went down to defeat at the congress, and for the sake of party discipline he went along with the maximalist-reformist majority. *Il Soviet* briefly suspended publication. The Socialist party then won an enormous victory at the polls in November 1919. Divisions within the party and Italy’s worsening economic and political instability, however, led to a paralysis of parliament. The government

ceased to maintain order as a civil war broke out between Fascists and Socialists. Grigori Zinoviev, the president of the Third International, noted at the time of its second congress, in 1920, that all the Communist leaders expected the immediate eruption of a proletarian revolution in Italy. The takeover of the factories in Turin later that year seemed to confirm the analysis of Zinoviev and his Third International colleagues. Five hundred thousand people from all over Italy participated in the takeover, but it dwindled into nothing and ended ignominiously. In his monumental history of the Italian Communist party, Spriano notes that the failure of the factory occupations signaled the beginning of a long phase of “withdrawal and retreat by the Italian working class, and more than that of defeat.”³⁵

The Italian Communist Party

In the wake of the debacle in the factories of Turin, the procommunist factions in the Socialist party resolved to create their own independent organization. Bordiga and Gramsci led the breakaway, which took place at the fabled Livorno congress, 15–20 January 1921. Those six days shook the world of Italian socialism, and the left would never be the same again. From the fiery polemics in the densely crowded Goldoni Theater the reformists on the right, the maximalists in the center, and the communists on the left would emerge more divided than ever. These divisions played directly into the hands of Mussolini and became a crucial factor in the triumph of fascism. The congress debates took place in an atmosphere that Spriano describes as “turbulent” and “incandescent.”³⁶ The maximalist delegates, representing one hundred thousand party voters, vastly outnumbered the communists with fifty-eight thousand and the reformists with only fifteen thousand. From the beginning of the proceedings, the main issue concerned fidelity or resistance to the Third International.

Gramsci, who according to Spriano had a complex about speaking in public, did not address the delegates at Livorno. Umberto Terracini, one of Gramsci’s closest collaborators, spoke for the *Ordine Nuovo* faction on 17 January, and then, two days later, Bordiga gave his speech. These two addresses signaled the real debut of the Italian Communist party.

Terracini came right to the point when he said that the communists

wanted to give “a legitimate form to our membership in the Third International.” He was referring to the “Twenty-One Conditions” for membership in the Third International, adopted at its second congress in July 1920. Italian communists had met at Imola on 28–29 November 1920 and had agreed to present a resolution at Livorno in keeping with Moscow’s conditions, including changing the name of the Socialist party to the Communist party and expelling all noncommunists. Terracini demanded that the theses of the Third International be accepted “in the determined manner that Moscow has laid down.” Otherwise a new communist party should be created. “The Communist party,” Terracini told the delegates, would be “the creator of the spiritual premises for revolution.” He thought that the Russian Revolution had to be accepted completely, including not only its “aims,” but its “forms” and “methods” as well.³⁷

When Bordiga rose to speak on 19 January, he declared that Terracini already had presented the principal communist theses. Now he only wanted to add some comments on the deep historical background of the Socialist party’s breakup, mainly concerning the betrayal of “fundamental Marxist doctrines and revolutionary praxis” in Italy. Under the guidance of false leaders, the Italian proletariat had become “a coefficient of equilibrium and conservation of the bourgeois regime.” Reformism had decentered Marxism in Italy. People had entered the prewar Socialist party from vague sentiments of uplift, not from the sense that they were making a precise ideological choice. Marxism, at its core, held that “the great interest of the proletarian class cannot, must not, and will never realize itself in the structures of present [capitalist] politics.” Moreover, by the same line of Marxist reasoning, it would be impossible “to exit peacefully from the [institutional] structures of the present society.” Paraphrasing Lenin, Bordiga insisted that the proletariat could reach its “supreme destinies” only by smashing “the political institutions on which capitalism bases its power.” The contradictions of capitalism necessarily led to “a supreme revolutionary battle between the classes.” Lenin had formulated a winning strategy for this battle.³⁸

Although Bordiga had opposed the war, he welcomed into the ranks of the Communist party “those youths who, from the experience of capitalist infamy and from having been sent to the fratricide on the fronts of bourgeois battle, have returned with a new faith, in the war

for revolution.” The Communists offered men a cause for life, not just a political program for the next election. The Communist revolution would usher in a better world. The Bolsheviks in Russia had already begun the redemptive process that eventually would spread to all countries and free mankind from exploitation and want. The Third International existed as the mechanism for communists everywhere to transform their societies along the lines of the Bolshevik model. To live the revolution was the greatest experience open to man. Communists were living the revolution, Bordiga declared in his peroration. They were on the move, taking “the honor” of the Socialist party with them, toward “the supreme tests that await us, toward the ultimate struggle, toward the Republic of Soviets in Italy.”³⁹

At the same session, Giacinto Menotti Serrati also spoke, “in terribly bad voice, [but] in even worse spirits.” He explained the differences between the maximalists and the communists from the former’s point of view. He implored the party to remain united. Having given his whole life to the Socialist party, Serrati felt terrified at the prospect of its imminent breakup. The communist faction of Gramsci and Bordiga had criticized him for his resistance to the directives of the Third International, but Serrati rejected their accusation, insisting that he supported the International “with all the ardor” of his soul. Completely rejecting the antirevolutionary position of the reformers, he found nothing wrong with the Bolshevik program itself. Difficulties had arisen in his mind with the Bolsheviks’ method of imposing their program, however, when the Twenty-One Conditions had been handed down as a decree. “Our full, most ardent desire [is] to place ourselves in line with the International, to do our full duty to the International,” but Serrati resented the organization’s intrusiveness and peremptoriness. The Third International wanted a purge of the Italian Socialist party and a change of its name to the Communist party. To these demands Serrati replied: “Permit that the purge be done in a more serene and tranquil way” and leave the proud name of the Socialist party alone.⁴⁰

In reply to Terracini, Bordiga, and Serrati, Turati gave a remarkably prophetic speech that same day. When he rose to speak, the communist delegates shouted “Long live Russia!” Cited by name in Lenin’s Twenty-One Conditions as one of the notorious opportunists in the socialist movement, Turati embodied for the communists everything

about reformist socialism of which they were most ashamed. Turati did not respond to the taunts of his communist antagonists. He addressed the assembly, "Comrade friends and comrade adversaries; I do not want to say, I must not say, enemies." Aware that many of the delegates wanted him to be ousted from the party, Turati dryly observed that it had been his destiny always "to be a defendant before this or that tribunal." He could not resist a Polonius-to-Laertes tone in his address. Idolatry took many forms, all of them bad, Turati explained. What men wrote and did required criticism, not worship, whether the words and deeds be those of "Turati, Serrati, or even Marx and Lenin." The communists, utterly abandoned to their worship of Bolshevism, had failed to comprehend the need for a critical approach to politics and thought. They could be acutely perceptive in their critique of capitalism, but on the subject of Lenin they possessed no credibility at all.⁴¹

Turati condemned Bolshevism as a dangerous idol. Echoing Kautsky, who in *The Dictatorship of the Proletariat* (1918) and *Terrorism and Communism: A Contribution to the Natural History of Revolution* (1919) had exposed the terror tactics of the Bolsheviks, Turati declared that the events in Russia since October 1917 made it clear that nothing could come from Leninism but "tyrannical despotism." With their frightening calls for the eradication of heresy against Bolshevism, Italian communists had shown themselves to be the dangerous fanatics that their mentors in Moscow wanted them to be. A dictatorship of such individuals, all of them obsessed by "violence, the cult of violence, the dictatorship of the proletariat, and the persecution of heresy," just might fall short of the utopia that they believed in with such childlike simplicity and innocence. Turati begged the delegates not to adopt the morally bankrupt and politically unworkable Bolshevik model. If the Socialists were to heed the advice of the communist faction, they would exasperate "the resistance of the opposition and [provoke] reactions and counterrevolution." The Fascists would be the ultimate beneficiaries of a communist victory at Livorno, he predicted.⁴²

Turati made another prediction that he felt absolutely certain would come to pass. Shouts of "Long live Russia" again resounded in his ears as he declared: "Someday . . . when the myth of Bolshevism is no more, when this Bolshevism will have suffered bankruptcy or been transformed by necessity into something else, our victory will come." He

hoped that Italy would not have to pay a frightful price in blood for the folly of the communists, who in wrecking party unity were handing victory to the enemies of the workers. Turning directly to the communists in the audience, Turati affirmed: "Continue with your 'the worse things are the better things are' methods of the anarchists. Believe and hope that from growing misery social vindication can be born; [but I say that] the only things born will be the white guards and fascism, misery, ignorance, and ruin. Long live socialism."⁴³

The communist faction, led by Bordiga, serenaded the departing Turati with a lusty rendition of the "International," and then they sang it again upon leaving the hall to make their way to the Teatro San Marco, where the founding congress of the Communist party would be held on 21 January 1921. Hundreds of delegates, including a Soviet representative of the Third International, filled the theater. They sang the "International" yet again, and the work of creating the Italian Communist party (Partito Comunista d'Italia) section of the Communist International proceeded to its conclusion. Bordiga, though not yet named as secretary, emerged as the dominant figure in the deliberations that followed over the party's statute. He was far more important than Gramsci at this initial stage of the party's history.

The statute of the Communist party, sixty-seven articles long, made clear its Bolshevik character. A Leninist emphasis on the central role of the party, "the indispensable organ of the proletariat in the revolutionary struggle," characterized the document. Bourgeois power in Italy would have to be broken with Bolshevik methods. The Italian dictatorship of the proletariat would take its political bearings, as in Soviet Russia, from "the system of workers' councils" made up of proletarians and peasants. The communist government would have the right to protect itself against "all counterrevolutionary attempts," and this meant taking away from the proletariat's class enemies "every means of agitation and political propaganda." In imposing socialism on society, the government would decide who the proletariat's class enemies were. With all class divisions in society eliminated, parliament would no longer be necessary.⁴⁴

In his analysis of the Communist party's statute, Spriano likens it to an "army manual." In stark contrast to the laissez-faire Socialists, the Communists imposed a military discipline on their members. They adopted strict attendance rules: a member who missed three meetings

without a valid excuse, produced in a timely manner, would be expelled. Expulsion could also result from infractions of discipline and from unspecified “unworthy actions” (*indegnità*). Communist representatives in parliament had to observe an iron party discipline and “to be always and at any moment at the disposition of the Executive Committee.” The same held true for Communist journalists, who were expected to follow the party line unquestioningly. All card-carrying Socialists would have one month from the promulgation of the statute to join the new party; thereafter, new applicants would be subjected to a period of candidacy before being admitted. Approximately forty thousand people joined the Communist party during its first year, and they defined themselves by contrasting their clear Bolshevik revolutionary identity with the Hamlet-like confusion of Serrati’s maximalists and the aggressive anti-Bolshevism of Turati’s reformists.⁴⁵

In a document entitled “Manifesto to the Workers of Italy,” Bordiga and the other Communist leaders tried to explain what had happened at Livorno and why the Partito Comunista d’Italia should be “*your* Party.” They boasted of the party’s revolutionary pedigree: “Its principles and its program tell you that the Communist party stands on the terrain of Marxist thought, of critical communism, of *The Communist Manifesto*, as the entire movement of the Moscow International does.” Only those “who truly feel and understand, in mind and heart, the great revolutionary principles of the Communist International” were urged to join the party.⁴⁶ Bordiga and his fellow hierarchs also addressed at length the Socialist charge that they were under orders from Moscow. Lenin did not control them, they insisted. In reality, Italian Communists followed the directives not of one man but of the congress of the Third International, where delegates representing Communist parties from all over the world participated. Representatives of Italian Communists had joined in the deliberations leading to the Twenty-One Conditions. Therefore, it could not be said that the party was responding like a lapdog to the commands of its master.

Bordiga and the other founders vowed in the Manifesto to dedicate themselves single-mindedly to the cause of revolution. Their union work and their political activity in parliament would be nothing more than “the means to prepare the proletariat for the final struggle.” The present crisis required rigorous discipline. The Communist party would organize itself so as to be “capable of securely arranging

and directing the revolutionary force of the proletariat.” Communist groups and cells would be created in readiness for the uprising. The founders proposed to infiltrate political and economic groups of all kinds “to transform them into instruments of revolutionary action directed by the Party.” They ordered Communists who held elective office at the communal, provincial, or parliamentary level “to remain at their post” and “to follow the revolutionary tactic decided on by the International Congress with absolute subordination to the directive organs of the party.” To the workers, they declared: “Your battle station is with the new Party, it is in the new Party . . . Forward for revolutionary victory, side by side with the Communists of the entire world . . . Down with the renegades and the traitors to the proletarian cause!”⁴⁷

The Communists left Livorno confident that revolution was right around the corner, but counterrevolution awaited them instead. Fascist counterrevolution against a communist revolution that never happened, in Ernst Nolte’s penetrating analysis, defined the post-Livorno era in the history of Italian Marxism. At Livorno the Communists vented their wrath on Serrati and Turati, assuming the maximalists and the reformists to be the worst conceivable enemies of the working class. They then went forth from the purifying rites of their founding convention to attack the liberal status quo, but they failed to see until too late that another force of overwhelming power had taken the field. By the spring of 1921 the Communists no longer spoke about the coming revolution. They were completely on the defensive by then in a lopsided struggle against the battle-hardened veterans who constituted the shock troops of fascism. Spriano underscores the importance of the left’s failure to put a countervailing military force in the field. The so-called civil war between the left and the right in postwar Italy was really a turkey shoot.⁴⁸

Mussolini’s Napoleonic triumph over the left has inspired many analyses and interpretations, none more succinct than that of Umberto Terracini, who in 1978 stated: “We were all mistaken in our judgments and forecasts.” No one on the left understood what fascism was. Mussolini, meanwhile, possessed perfect knowledge of his adversaries, especially the revolutionaries, with whose core faith he had intimate acquaintance. In his classic book on Mussolini’s takeover, *Nascita e avvento del fascismo*, Angelo Tasca made this same point. Tasca, a founding member of the Communist party and a zealous proponent

of a united front strategy against fascism, argued that Mussolini's successes were due primarily to "the errors, the illusions, [and] the weaknesses" of his adversaries. Superior Fascist leadership and tactics won the battle against the divided and passive Socialists and the united but isolated Communists. Tasca thought that for their blind stubbornness and inability to comprehend the reality of fascism the Communists deserved the lion's share of the blame for bringing Mussolini to power.⁴⁹

Bordiga, who in Tasca's account of the Fascist takeover played an entirely though not a uniquely negative role, worked at isolating the Communists. As party secretary, he made a fetish of Bolshevik orthodoxy, and the cardinal principle of that ideology was revolution first, last, and always. He wanted to train an elite corps of disciplined and committed revolutionaries who at the right moment would be capable of dealing capitalism a fatal blow, just as the Bolsheviks had done in Russia. Bordiga wanted to hear nothing, not even from the Third International or directly from Lenin himself, about compromise or cooperation with the Socialists, much less with any of the other bourgeois parties. He had not helped to destroy party unity at Livorno only to climb back into bed with the Socialists. Bordiga continued to think of the Italian situation as a carbon copy of the one exploited so brilliantly by Lenin in 1917. The tactics that had brought communism to Russia would work in Italy. Bordiga pursued this comparison to its logical extreme and concluded, in the face of growing Third International pressure for a united front against fascism, that the Bolsheviks had betrayed their own principles.

Bordiga firmly held on to his faith in pristine Bolshevism through every development leading up to the Fascist takeover: setbacks for the left in the May 1921 elections; a worsening industrial crisis; growing unemployment and inflation; rising levels of violence against working-class union halls, party headquarters, economic cooperatives, and newspapers; and the bloody rout of the left in the strikes of 1–3 August 1922. He was not alone. As Tasca later would write, "almost the entire Communist party," including Gramsci, supported Bordiga in his anti-united-front fervor. Throughout this period the Communists appeared to be more concerned about "unmasking" Socialists, as Spriano puts it, than about fighting Fascists.⁵⁰

In the wake of fascism's stunning display of power in putting down the August 1922 strikes, Bordiga continued to voice opposition to the

united-front strategy. He persisted in his argument that the other non-Fascist parties served as the pawns of Mussolini, and he could see no difference between liberalism and fascism. Only the Communists were reliably anti-Fascist. The Third International repeated its calls for the Communists to team up with the Socialists, and for a time it seemed as if a rupture might occur. The party finally backed down, but continued to try to modify or to subvert the Third International's united-front directives. As the Communist party went increasingly on the defensive, it also shrank. Many factors affected the party's decline, but economic incentives surely played a crucial role. Encouraged by the success of the Fascist campaign for order, factory owners began to fire known Communist workers. From a high of forty thousand, party membership dropped in September 1922 to fewer than twenty-seven thousand.⁵¹

Mussolini could not have asked for a more favorable situation than the one he found in the fall of 1922. The Communists, immersed in a nasty and debilitating conflict with the Third International, continued to view the Socialists as their primary enemy. The Socialists, wallowing in their endemic factionalism, suffered another schism at this time when the maximalists expelled the reformists. The Liberals, completely demoralized, had no idea what to do. The Vatican, while revolted at the thought of an avowed atheist as prime minister, undercut the Catholic Popolare party and favored the creation of a Fascist government as a means of heading off revolution. The monarchy supported Mussolini for the same reason that the Church did: order above all. At the end of October the Fascists marched on Rome, and King Victor Emmanuel III charged Mussolini with the responsibility of forming a ministry. He was 39 years old, the youngest prime minister in Italian history. At the fourth congress of the Third International, held in the Soviet Union just as the March on Rome was taking place, Bordiga characterized the Fascist takeover as a "ministerial crisis" within the Liberal establishment and viewed the collapse of parliament as a positive development in setting the stage for communist revolution. He embodied the communists' "the worse things are the better things are" mentality that Turati had criticized at Livorno the previous year.

In any general overview of Italian history from 1922 to just before the fall of the Fascist regime in July 1943, the story of the Communist

party has very limited significance. Eager to show the Italians that the country at last had a government capable of dealing with the agents of Moscow, Mussolini swiftly dismantled most of the legal structures of the party. The year 1923 became known in Communist annals as the year zero when many of the party's top national and regional leaders went to prison. Bordiga was arrested in February and did not gain his freedom until October of that year. Thereafter, the party led a twilight existence before going completely underground. For the next twenty years the Communists gave Mussolini so little trouble that one wonders why he bothered about them so much. De Felice's famous thesis about the "consensus" that Fascism enjoyed may be overdrawn, as some of his critics charge, but the Communists found little opening in Italy until Mussolini's defeat in World War II gave them their opportunity, which they exploited brilliantly. The Fascist era, however, possesses the highest importance for the history of the party itself precisely because of the trauma that the Communists underwent in these years. The party's formative experience occurred under fascism. It is impossible to understand the peculiar character of Italian Communism during the Cold War years of its maximum political strength and cultural influence without a knowledge of the prior period when the party barely stayed alive and at that only through the support of Stalin.

On 24 February 1924 Bordiga gave a speech in Rome to commemorate Lenin's recent death. He praised Lenin for "a contribution of the highest order" to the Marxist class struggle and called him "the restorer of the philosophical doctrine of Marxism." He then listed the classic Lenin texts that had completely reshaped and reinvigorated the culture of the Marxist left in Italy: *Materialismo e criticismo empirico*; *Imperialismo*; and *Stato e rivoluzione*. These books had rolled across Italy like barrages of heavy artillery fire. To Bordiga, encircled by the reformist enemy, they had signaled the arrival of a liberating army. If Marx had been the Italian revolutionary left's Old Testament Jehovah, Lenin had come as its New Testament Redeemer. He had redeemed the Marxists, first by brilliant theory and then by triumphant practice, from the dread curse of reformism, which Bordiga defined as un-Marxist ploys on the left to uphold bourgeois democracy, parliamentary legalism, "and all similar panaceas." Lenin, more than anyone else

for Bordiga's generation, had elucidated the revolutionary content of Marxism.⁵²

Bordiga coupled expressions of respect for the Bolshevik leader with declarations about his own principles in guiding the Italian Communist party as its first secretary. He acknowledged his numerous disagreements with Lenin. If he held the Russian leader in the highest esteem as a Marxist theorist and revolutionary commander, he could not be as generous in his praise when it came time to examine the Bolshevik record after October 1917. He was especially critical of the Third International, which turned out to be just like any other representative body: it pursued the politically expedient, most notoriously in Italy with shameless calls for cooperation between the Socialists and the Communists. The leaders of the Third International simply did not understand the Italian situation, and they had become abjectly reformist in their general outlook. Bordiga wanted "the general insurrection of the proletarian dictatorship," not the kind of election strategy that would make it easy to lose sight of the party's revolutionary aim. He expressed admiration for "revolutionary audacity" above all.⁵³ In his speech, he mourned the passing of Lenin, but the waning of Bolshevism's revolutionary élan seemed to him an even greater tragedy. Dynamic Leninism, he thought, had hardened into bureaucratic formalism while Lenin still lived.

Something considerably more severe than bureaucratic formalism lay in store for the Russian people after Lenin, and Bordiga voiced strong criticism of the administrative tendencies, already well developed in the Third International, that would culminate in Stalinism. Bordiga was no democrat. He believed passionately in dictatorship. His quarrel with Lenin and, later, with Stalin did not turn on the functioning or the malfunctioning of the International's internal democratic machinery, assuming that such machinery existed in the first place. He criticized Lenin and then Stalin for their failure to promote worldwide revolution. Bordiga wanted to live the revolution, but it seemed to him that the Russians had another agenda, of wanting to cooperate with the capitalist world for opportunistic reasons. Their dilatory strategy of coalition politics, with hardly a word now about the revolution that would transform Italy from a capitalist to a communist state, brought to Bordiga's mind images of the reformism he had spent his entire political career opposing.

Gramsci, whose rivalry with Bordiga had been growing steadily, also paid tribute to Lenin at about this time. He spoke words of praise unalloyed by any criticism whatsoever. To Gramsci, Lenin had been “the most characteristic and expressive living example of what a revolutionary leader is.” “Comrade Lenin,” he continued, “had been the initiator of a new epoch in history.” With no models to guide him, Lenin had created the first functioning dictatorship of the proletariat. Unlike the Fascist dictatorship, Gramsci rhapsodized, “the dictatorship of the proletariat is expansive, not repressive.” The Soviet system of worker councils provided the dictatorship of the proletariat with “a continuous circulation of men” who rose from the bottom of society to the top “under the direction and control of the proletariat.”⁵⁴ Lenin had seen to everything and deserved the everlasting gratitude of humanity. His system was as close to democratic perfection as human nature allowed. Reading Gramsci’s article and accounts of Bordiga’s speech, the successors of Lenin in Moscow would have had little doubt about which of the two Italian Communist leaders they preferred. Indeed, forces already had been set in motion to dislodge the “extremist” Bordiga from his position as party secretary and to replace him with the “centrist” Gramsci. Although in his searing pamphlet *Extremism, the Infantile Sickness of Communism* Lenin had been concerned mainly about the German situation, the Soviet leadership now singled out Bordiga as the embodiment of this infirmity.

Antonio Gramsci: The Revolutionary as Centrist

[With communism] the need for violence against people in general, for the *subordination* of one man to another, and of one section of the population to another, will vanish altogether since people will *become accustomed* to observing the elementary conditions of social life *without violence* and *without subordination*.

—Lenin, *The State and Revolution*

Antonio Gramsci is the most famous and influential Marxist in Italian history and, arguably, in the world today. No other figure in the annals of Italian Marxism has an international scholarly society named after him as Gramsci does. In 1991, the centenary of Gramsci's birth, academic conferences devoted to his work were held in Tokyo, New Delhi, Cairo, Santiago, and New York. In 1992 Columbia University Press began publishing an English translation of the three-thousand-page *Quaderni del carcere* (Prison Notebooks) in its entirety. John Cammett's *Bibliografia gramsciana* contains over six thousand items in twenty-six languages.¹

The very real complexity of the man has been compounded by the way his ideas reached the world, initially in the late 1940s with the publication of the *Quaderni del carcere* and then later through the translations of this masterpiece down to the Columbia University project. The primary Gramsci problem arises not from these translations but from the book itself. What people today know about Gramsci they get in the main from the *Prison Notebooks*. His earlier work is much less well known, particularly outside Italy. To appreciate the *Prison Notebooks* we need to examine his entire career. Such an examination will illuminate as well the vital role that Gramsci played in the history of the Marxist revolutionary tradition.

Born in 1891, Gramsci experienced the poverty and backwardness of the South at first hand. He grew up in a desolate part of Sardinia during the aftermath of the island's terrible agricultural collapse of the 1880s. The Gramsci family, of Greco-Albanian ancestry, enjoyed a financially secure life during Antonio's first six years. His father, Francesco, was from Gaeta, near Naples, and had moved to Sardinia to take a job as the director of a government registry office in Ghilarza. With a government administrator's salary, the elder Gramsci could afford to maintain his wife and seven children in ease and comfort. Then, in 1897, disaster struck. Accused of malfeasance, he lost his job and went to jail for nearly six years. Local political intrigue no doubt played a role in his downfall, but his son's distinctly sympathetic biographer, Giuseppe Fiori, acknowledges that "there certainly were irregularities in the office."² Bereft of the family breadwinner in the crushing circumstances of disgrace, the Gramscis lost all their social status and financial security. Antonio's mother, Peppina Marcias, took in a boarder and sewing to keep the family from starving. Gramsci often went to bed hungry and at school felt degraded by his shabby, poorly made clothes.

The other tragedy of Gramsci's young life concerned his physical deformities. Born a beautiful baby, he did not grow normally and developed a hump on his back. The family attributed Antonio's plight to a fall in his infancy, and a servant did admit to having dropped him. Whatever the cause, he became a misshapen dwarf. Gramsci's physical suffering, the family's tribulations, and the misery of the island powerfully influenced his sensibility. When a high school teacher introduced him to Marxism, Gramsci was primed for it. He brought to his reading of Marx a heart full of anguish and yearning, which thereafter began to be channeled into the revolutionary cause of the proletariat. The intelligent, sensitive, and proud Gramsci reacted to his traumatic childhood experiences with a passionate sense of injury that became the emotional foundation of his socialist worldview. The radical liberal Piero Gobetti (1901–1926) admiringly said of him: "His socialism is above all a response to the hurts inflicted by society on an immigrant from Sardinia living in solitude."³ In socialism the naturally bright young man found a highly intellectualistic cause that also satisfied his emotional needs.

Gramsci overcame all obstacles and in 1911 won a scholarship to

study at the University of Turin. Lack of money continued to plague him, and his health rapidly deteriorated when winter came. He smoked too much and had to brave the bitter cold with inadequate clothing. Nevertheless, he did well in his language and literature courses. He joined the Socialist party in 1913 during his third year at the university. His circle of party intimates included Angelo Tasca, Umberto Terracini, and Palmiro Togliatti. All four of them were in their early twenties and deeply interested in radical politics. They admiringly viewed Mussolini as the incarnation of the Socialist party's revolutionary soul. Gramsci gradually drifted away from his course work and never took a degree.

When the war broke out the following year, Gramsci made his debut as a political writer by supporting Mussolini's thesis in "Neutralità attiva ed operante." For his own article, Gramsci used Mussolini's title and declared that in the face of the politically revolutionary situation created by the war, the formula of absolute neutrality only served the interests of the reformists. Socialist action should have one aim—to further the cause of revolution—and the war might do just that by preparing the proletariat to take over "after a failure or demonstrated weakness of the ruling class." Therefore, the party ought to be flexible in its response to the war. It should weigh the pros and cons of neutrality and intervention, deciding in favor of one position or the other strictly on the basis of how best to sharpen the class struggle in Italy. The logic of absolute neutrality proceeded directly from the traditional ingenuousness and "Buddhist renunciation" of the pacifists who for too long had controlled the party's destiny. Hence, Mussolini was right: the Socialists should abandon absolute neutrality in favor of "active and efficacious neutrality." They should replace a pacifist cliché with a principle that at least would permit the proletariat to take advantage of the revolutionary potential in the war.⁴

It took a long time for Gramsci to recover from his endorsement of Mussolini's notorious interventionist article. His debut as a political writer nearly killed his career as a Socialist intellectual. For years afterward his enemies in the party would taunt him for having been an interventionist of the first hour. He stayed out of print for nearly a year and then returned to journalism as a cultural critic. He quickly developed into one of the party's most perceptive and supple writers, and his distinctive vision of Marxism as a battle of proletarian versus bourgeois ideas and values began to take shape during the war years.

Gradually, Gramsci returned to political commentary, following events in revolutionary Russia with particular interest. On 29 April 1917 he wrote in *Il Grido del Popolo*: “We . . . are convinced that the Russian Revolution is not simply an event, but a proletarian act, and that it must naturally result in a socialist régime.” The fall of the tsar was “the beginning of a new order that coincides with all that our masters have taught us.” Gramsci still did not have a clear idea of Lenin’s activities, but he had no doubt about the immense historical importance of Bolshevism as “the light from the East [that] shines on the old Western world.” On 28 July he declared that Bolshevism stood for “all of socialism.”⁵

The following month Turin erupted in violence over food shortages, and it seemed as if the city would become in fact what it was in name: the Italian Petrograd. Ever since the February Revolution in Russia, the working-class quarters of Turin had been a ferment of *fare come in Russia* (do as in Russia) activity, with the most extreme left-wing Socialists urging the industrial proletariat to resist the war and to prepare for an insurrection against the government. Bread riots occurred in August, followed by a bloody insurrection lasting four days. Tanks and machine guns were employed against the insurrectionists, of whom 41 were killed and 193 injured.⁶ Nearly a thousand more were imprisoned or made to join the army. In the aftermath of this violence, Gramsci became the editor of *Il Grido del Popolo* and emerged for the first time as a party section leader. The timing of the uprising, which occurred shortly after the visit of four Soviet delegates to the city, made clear to Gramsci the connection between events in Russia and Italy. Politically, nascent Gramscianism did not go beyond a straightforward imitation of the Russians.

Shortly after the Bolshevik seizure of power, Gramsci wrote “The Revolution against *Das Kapital*,” in which he interpreted Leninism as both a continuation and a revision of Marxism. Marx had argued that socialism could not triumph without the prior creation of a bourgeois capitalist economy, but “events have overtaken ideology.” By their triumphant actions, the Bolsheviks had demonstrated that “the canons of historical materialism are not as iron-like as one might think and has been thought.” Gramsci did not mean to infer that Marxism now lacked relevance for Socialists. On the contrary, by shucking the withered reformist husks of the doctrine, the Bolsheviks had laid bare its kernel of revolution. Lenin had reduced the problem of contempo-

rary Marxism to its essential terms: how to adapt the doctrine to the horrendous situation that capitalism had produced in the world. The Bolshevik leader straightforwardly proposed to attack capitalism in all countries, no matter what their stage of capitalist development. This was Lenin's "revolution against *Das Kapital*," and no one in Italy became more attached to Bolshevism than Gramsci.⁷

Lenin had achieved greatness, Gramsci thought, by ingeniously adapting the essential principles of Marxism to a unique revolutionary situation. Leninism, in other words, meant being flexible on the tactics of revolution while adhering to the philosophy of Marxist revolution. Gramsci continued to revere Marx as "a necessary and integrating part of our spirit that would not be what it is if he had not lived, if he had not thought, if the collision of his passion and ideas had not sent sparks of light flying."⁸ Marx had conceived an original critique of capitalism as well as a replacement socialist philosophy for it. He had left this doctrine, however, in a fragmentary state. Marxism would always be a work to be continued by those who came after the master himself. Lenin had emerged as the first great Marxist philosopher to advance human understanding of the dialectic beyond the frontiers of Marx's own explanation.

In 1918 Gramsci took what he called the middle ground in his defense of the Bolshevik dictatorship. Russia was neither "a jail of cruel, ferocious, and utopian madmen" nor "a social paradise where wisdom, love, culture, and reason alone govern and direct life." Fanatics and utopians abounded in Russia, but the Bolsheviks could not be judged by their most extreme members: "What matters is the direction, the general tendency that reveals itself in a movement." The direction and general tendency of Bolshevism could not be gleaned from the movement's least balanced critics and defenders. Gramsci thought their judgments "stupid" and "demagogic." Although he declared that he wanted to avoid both of these extremes, his conclusions made him very much a witness for the defense. The Bolsheviks had smashed heads in imposing their order on Russia, he acknowledged. But most of this violence had been therapeutic for society as a whole and unavoidable. While reactionary and bourgeois elites had suffered, the proletariat had been freed for the first time in history. Gramsci assessed the revolution as decidedly beneficial, and now the Bolsheviks were working to create a socialist society: "In Russia the government is tending to create itself with the consent of the governed, with the de

facto self-determination of the governed.” After one hundred years in power bourgeois governments had only succeeded in multiplying “feudal tyrannies,” but in just six months the Bolsheviks had given hope to the world that socialism would put an end at last to the suffering and exploitation inflicted by capitalism.⁹

Gramsci honored Lenin as one of history’s greatest men. Over the feudal reactionaries, the rapacious bourgeoisie, and the misguided Mensheviks, Lenin had won the most stunning political triumph of all time. A consummate realist, he understood power. He knew that all power had to be concentrated in the dictatorship of the proletariat, not shared “with diverse elements of the liberal bourgeoisie.” The bourgeoisie did not want real democracy; they wanted a representative system. If Lenin had listened to the advocates of democratic power-sharing, Russia would have gone the way of the Western capitalist countries. The representatives, and through them the capitalist elites, would have been controlling the people instead of the other way around. By creating an authentically Marxist dictatorship of the proletariat and, as Gramsci believed, by maintaining its organic relationship with the factory worker councils, Lenin had made the people truly sovereign. The Bolshevik leader had put the new Russian society on “solid and permanent foundations, according to the dictates of the Marxist conception.”¹⁰

The New Order (1919–1922)

With his new journal, *L'Ordine Nuovo*, Gramsci continued to develop the ideas about Leninism that he had presented in *Il Grido del Popolo*. A five-part article, “Vita politica internazionale,” reveals his outlook at this time. He began the piece with a desolating image: “The picture of international politics gives the impression of a frightening storm in a landscape of ruins.” The world familiar to the prewar generation had collapsed, and “a process of decomposition” threatened to overwhelm humanity in a world that had become prey to famines and epidemics. No intellectually honest person, Gramsci thought, could doubt the responsibility of capitalism for the horrors of 1914 to 1918 and their terrifying postwar aftermath. The world cried out for a “new order,” one that he believed could only be created by “a new ruling class,” the workers and the peasants, as in Bolshevik Russia.¹¹

Gramsci saw Bolshevism as the only hope left for mankind. He as-

sailed parliamentary democracy as a complete sham and as the political expression of the false liberty he associated with capitalism. For democracy to be real, the administrative organs of government had to be “created by the masses themselves, with the real participation of the masses in the administration of the country and in the socialist work of [the] construction [of society].” He continued to place his faith in the factory councils, made up of the workers themselves, as the ultimate guarantor of the Bolshevik system’s democratic character. Gramsci imagined these councils to be Bolshevism’s failsafe system. They would provide a corrective for the inevitable problem of bureaucratic centralism in the dictatorship of the proletariat. Thus, he could write with complete confidence about “the expulsion of the capitalist from the factory, the conquest of the State by the proletariat, and the installation of the regime of Councils” as the ideal solution for the problems inflicted upon the world by “the atrocious vampire” of capitalism. The “Russian Commune,” as he called Lenin’s experiment, gave men hope that a better day was coming after “the blood and the disasters of five years of war.” Thus began in Gramsci’s *Ordine Nuovo* and in Bordiga’s *Soviet* the long romance between Italian communists and Soviet institutions.¹²

Everywhere Gramsci looked he saw signs and portents of capitalism’s final cataclysm, and for the two years of its existence as a cultural journal *L’Ordine Nuovo* diligently reported the events of Europe’s postwar crisis. The *ordinovisti* assumed that the revolution would break out momentarily. As one Italian government after another sank under a wave of postwar economic woes and political instability, their assumption appeared plausible. Gramsci, like Bordiga, criticized the leaders of the Socialist party for their do-nothing policies. In particular, the *ordinovisti* despised Turati for his Kautsky-like condemnation of Bolshevism. They attacked him as well for his reformist delusions regarding how “the form of democratic institutions can be corrected, here and there touched up.”¹³ From just this erroneous conception of the historical process the many other errors of reformism stemmed, and Turati embodied them all. The communist antidote to “Turatianism” lay close at hand: the Third International.

Yet Gramsci differed in important ways from Bordiga, who in these years also wanted to strike down the bourgeois establishment at the earliest opportunity. For Bordiga, revolution presented few complications. He called for an immediate uprising in the Bolshevik manner.

Gramsci and the *ordinovisti*, while taking second place to no one in their desire for revolution, had a much more complex understanding of what the overthrow of capitalism actually would entail. A revolutionary vanguard would have to be trained to do in Italy what Lenin and the Bolsheviks had done in Russia.

Gramsci and his *Ordine Nuovo* colleagues laid down very specific guidelines for the Italian revolution they had in mind. To begin with, “it is necessary that the revolutionary vanguard create . . . the material and spiritual conditions in which the property-owning class is no longer able to govern the great mass of men peaceably, but is instead forced . . . to strike blindly and make them revolt.”¹⁴ Even if the objective Marxist conditions for revolution did not exist in Italy—the mantra of the reformists—the *ordinovisti* counseled the proletariat to begin to take action against its capitalist master. Gramsci envisaged revolution not as a coup d’état, however, but as a work of cultural subversion. Some of his later theories about the cultural aspects of hegemony and counterhegemony, about how ideas and culture impinge on the revolutionary process, found early expression in *L’Ordine Nuovo*. The reformist implications of Gramsci’s position were not lost on Tribune Bordiga, who in 1919 insisted that the Bolshevik model could be applied immediately in Italy. Such tensions would always exist between Italy’s two foremost Leninists.

In opposing the ever-eager Bordiga, Gramsci fretted about the unreliable human material that communist revolutionaries had to work with in Italy. The *ordinovisti* maintained that the Italian proletariat lacked a revolutionary consciousness, and the supplying of this lack they resolved to make the journal’s own special project: “to impart a historic personality, characterized by an organic complex of notions, concepts, logical connections, aspirations, [and] attitudes that really belong to the working class and to no other class.” In short, the proletariat needed a new culture. The proletarian revolution could only arise from new ways of producing and thinking. Indeed, the *ordinovisti* claimed that the single truly positive aspect of parliamentary political life in Italy lay in the opportunities afforded by election campaigns to raise the revolutionary consciousness of the masses. Not for a moment did they mistake the “democratic illusion” of Italy’s political system for the democratic reality of the dictatorship of the proletariat, which was always “outside and against parliament.”¹⁵

In 1919 Lenin castigated the Italian Socialist party for its amateurish

squandering of a golden revolutionary opportunity in Italy. Lenin's harsh words spurred the *ordinovisti* to sober reflection. "To us," they wrote, "Lenin's letter has been a reminder of an old Lenin thesis about the 'qualified' revolutionary."¹⁶ By this term Lenin meant that the revolutionary had to understand what revolutionary activity actually required in terms of practical preparation and leadership. An immense gap separated the qualified revolutionary from the mere agitator who in a haphazard and emotional way simply responded to discrete events without a sound Marxist knowledge of history and politics.

Who were the qualified revolutionaries in Italy? They were nowhere to be found. The Socialist party had not even made an attempt to go beyond "verbal affirmations" of revolution. The Italian proletarian masses had moved way ahead of the Socialists in understanding that the "'machine' of revolution" already was in motion. Even the country's communists, up to this point, had managed only "to grope in the dark." They could not yet be called qualified revolutionaries. The *ordinovisti* saw Italian communists "moving among the gigantic gears of history like a country bumpkin on a visit to a large industrial plant who, oscillating between arrogance and 'timorousness,' ventures into the hubbub and motion of the great machines." Lenin's letter, the *ordinovisti* felt, should draw the attention of all revolutionaries to the country's precarious situation "in a dark and indefinite period of crisis and desperation."¹⁷

As Italy's economic and political instability worsened in 1920, the *ordinovisti* engaged in increasingly bitter disputes with the hierarchy of the Socialist party. They denounced the party for its "decadence and lethargy" in the struggle against Mussolini.¹⁸ Fascism they saw as the armed reaction of the bourgeoisie to the proletariat's demands for justice. The Socialist party had no plan and, worse, no awareness that it needed one. Far from possessing the capacity to organize the workers' resistance to the bourgeoisie's offensive, the Socialist party was disintegrating. The ideological and strategic tension within the party could no longer be kept in balance, Gramsci affirmed. For him only one solution to the party's problems deserved consideration: strict adherence to the Leninist line espoused by the Third International.

In a campaign separate from that of Bordiga's followers but complementary to it as well, the *ordinovisti* cut themselves off completely from the reformists. They professed to owe the older generation of So-

cialists nothing: "We have done everything ourselves, with our own strength, with our own patience; the present Socialist generation is the child of itself." They refused to be criticized by those Socialists "who had not worked, who had not produced, who cannot leave any other legacy but a mediocre collection of mediocre articles in Italian newspapers." Against "the pitiless dictatorship of the capitalist class," the Socialist hierarchy could not even be described as a weaponless adversary. Caught in a hopeless contradiction between its formally revolutionary maximalists and its abjectly reformist moderates, the party was not an adversary of capitalism at all. The *ordinovisti* vowed to push aside "these men of the past, these petit-bourgeois intellectuals." A new generation of Socialists, one "that had acquired maturity in the passion of the war and revolutionary character in the study of the Bolshevik Revolution," stood ready to lead the proletariat in founding the Italian Soviet Republic.¹⁹

Lenin had been right all along, Gramsci proclaimed: without a proper theoretical understanding of Marxism, there could be no revolution. A genuine understanding of Marx required a Leninist emphasis on the revolutionary character of dialectical materialism. The reformists and the other opportunists who controlled the Italian Socialist party had abandoned Marxist doctrine completely and represented "in the field of organized labor an infiltration of the ideological agents of capitalism." Even the maximalists, who had mastered the rhetoric of revolution, had failed to present the working class with "the forms and the modes" for revolution and for the founding of a communist society. The faction of Italian communists within the party wanted to reattach "the mass of workers and peasants to Marxist doctrine" in imitation of Lenin. This mass first had to acquire consciousness of its historic destiny as the agent of capitalism's final catastrophe. The Socialist party should have led the way in raising the class consciousness of the proletariat, but the bureaucrats in the hierarchy lacked "soul and will." The *ordinovisti* asserted that the job was now theirs by default.²⁰

Most of the articles in *L'Ordine Nuovo* were unsigned, but in the 14 August 1920 issue Gramsci identified himself as the author of "The Program of Ordine Nuovo." Just a few months before, the journal had proudly announced that its readership had climbed to between forty-five hundred and five thousand people, including eleven hundred

subscribers. For a working-class journal of politics and culture *L'Ordine Nuovo* had to be counted a success, Gramsci boasted. Now he wanted to sum up the record of the journal after more than a year of publication. "The cataclysm of Italian society seemed imminent" when the *ordinovisti* had started to publish their journal in May 1919. They could not claim to have had a strategy for this crisis, however. "A vague passion for a vague proletarian culture" was the only bond that united them at the outset. They fought among themselves, but despite adversity and disagreement *L'Ordine Nuovo* emerged as the foremost proponent in Italy of the factory-council idea.²¹

Lenin continued to be the paramount theoretical authority and hero for the *ordinovisti*. They hailed him as the man "who had dedicated twenty-five years to the organizing of the Russian Bolshevik party, who had suffered exile, hunger, [and] cold to sustain loyally and openly his ideas and method." With pride they quoted Lenin's approval of *L'Ordine Nuovo* as the faithful Italian interpreter of "all the fundamental principles of the Third International." Lenin seconded the journal's criticisms of the Italian Socialist party. The party had failed to bring itself into line with the agenda of the Third International, and Lenin, therefore, called for a special congress at which Italian Socialists could rectify their situation, particularly regarding "the noncommunist elements." The *ordinovisti* triumphantly presented Lenin's argument as a confirmation of their own, that "the ideological and tactical residues of the Second International tradition" had not yet been eliminated from the Socialist party. The tactics of "parliamentary reformism," still cherished by a party hierarchy sunk in an "academically small-minded petit-bourgeois mentality of traditional Italian socialism," had to go once and for all in order to clear the way for the dictatorship of the proletariat and the factory-council system.²²

The *ordinovisti* restrained themselves when the workers occupied Turin's factories in September of 1920. They did not interpret the takeover as the revolution itself, but as "an historic event of the first magnitude . . . and a necessary moment in the revolutionary development of the class war." By ousting the capitalists from their premises, the workers had transformed every factory into "an illegal State, . . . a proletarian republic." The ultimate failure of the occupation did not discourage the *ordinovisti*. They tried to interpret the event as a kind of moral

victory, noting that despite the unfortunate outcome the workers had accumulated vital experience for their next assault on capitalism. Failure would be an inspiration for “a more disciplined, better organized, and tighter action” in the future.²³

The *ordinovisti* clamored more than ever now for the creation of a Communist party. During the occupation of the factories, they published an article entitled “The Communist Party.” What was this new phenomenon in Western European politics, they asked. Typically, “the Communist party, rising from the ashes of the socialist parties, repudiates its democratic and parliamentary origins and reveals its essential characteristics which are new in history.” The Communist party of Western Europe inherited its distinctive traits from the parent Bolshevik party, which had evolved in repudiation of everything for which the Second International had stood. Whereas the old-style socialist parties left their members alone and tolerated factions and beliefs of all kinds, the Communist party—emulating its Bolshevik parent and role model—had a completely different conception of itself. The Communist party required the order and discipline characteristic of Bolshevism. The Bolsheviks had presented the world with the most convincing proof of their matchless insights: a victorious proletarian revolution, one that had been accomplished “by men organized in the Communist party, who in the party had been given a new personality, had acquired new sentiments, [and] had developed a moral life that is tending to become the universal conscience and end for all men.” The *ordinovisti* wanted the Italian Communist party to be everything that the Socialist party was not: disciplined, organized, ideologically pure, and in full compliance with “the supreme authority of the world working-class movement”—the Third International.²⁴

Following the Communist secession at the Livorno congress of January 1921 and the creation of the Partito Comunista d'Italia (PCI), Gramsci remained subaltern to Bordiga in the hierarchy of the new party. He still had to live down his reputation as an interventionist. Moreover, Gramsci had come late to the secession position. At the November 1920 Imola congress of Socialist radicals, he had called for a Bolshevik renewal of the party. Only in the next month had he openly supported the creation of a new Communist party. Gramsci's credentials appeared suspect to many Communists. His nomination to the

party's Central Committee occasioned resistance, and he barely made it. The real party leaders, Bordiga and his inner circle, took care to exclude him from the Executive Committee.

The "New" *Ordine Nuovo*

Gramsci made his way up the party hierarchy by dint of his brilliance as a journalist and the support he gained from Lenin, who admired his mind. Even before the Livorno congress, *L'Ordine Nuovo* had become a daily newspaper. Still living in his modest student pension quarters with the Berra family in Turin, Gramsci now had to go about the city under armed guard for fear of a Fascist attack. The "new" *Ordine Nuovo* served as the official party newspaper, and Gramsci adhered strictly to Secretary Bordiga's line. Essentially, the Communist party claimed to be unique in Italian politics as the only organization capable of founding the Italian worker state. Only the Communists had the imprimatur of the Third International, "which by profiting from the precious and colossal experience of the Russian Revolution for the preparation of the universal revolution" now heroically persevered in organizing the international proletariat. Gramsci viewed the Socialists as a dangerous foe. No more urgent task confronted the Italian proletariat, he wrote on 9 January 1921, than "to unmask and to fight this dangerous political policy of the centrists" in the Socialist party.²⁵

Gramsci's searing attack on Turati reveals his true attitude toward a subject about which disinformation abounds in the contemporary celebration of Gramscianism as Marxism with the human face of democratic socialism. He thoroughly detested Turati and reviled him at every opportunity. Turati's critique of Bolshevism as a theoretical blueprint for the creation of state terrorism belonged to "the literature of democratic hypocrisy." Gramsci could think of nothing more monstrously false than Turati's contention that the Bolsheviks were leading the people of Russia to one of the worst catastrophes in history. Turati could only see the bad in Bolshevik Russia, but Gramsci countered that a fair-minded person at least would try to put in context the inevitably difficult transitional period from one social system to another. Such an individual would not take the worst features of a regime and claim them as its sum and substance. Turati had isolated and magnified discrete acts of violence and then had failed to explain their

relationship with the noble theme of proletarian progress under the leadership of the Bolsheviks.²⁶

Gramsci also charged that Turati completely mischaracterized the real causes of the Fascists' strength. Turati and the reformists were the real culprits, according to Gramsci. They had supported the parliamentary regime and had argued that liberal democracy was the best possible political arrangement for the working class, particularly in a period of growing reaction. Gramsci rejected Turati's claim that reaction had set in: "The Communists deny that the present period can be called 'reactionary'; they sustain instead that the current complex of events constitutes the most evident and abundant proof of the definitive decomposition of the bourgeois regime." Gramsci thought that Italy was still in a revolutionary period, eminently favorable to the left. The parliamentary elections of May 1921—in which the Fascists won only 35 seats against 123 for the Socialists, 16 for the Communists, and 110 for the Catholics—confirmed him in his optimism: "Reaction has lost its game; it did not succeed in obtaining national 'solidarity' for legalizing illegality."²⁷

Serrati, an even more frequent target of Gramsci's polemics in 1921–1922, had an entirely different view of the Italian political scene. In a letter of 28 April 1921 this Socialist veteran claimed he had never seen anything like the violence then being unleashed against the left: "It is not of the State, it does not stem from public power structures, it comes from below, and it manifests itself according to the will, the criminality, the brutality of diverse milieus." Giolitti's Liberal government, he explained, played merely an indirect and facilitating role in this violence. Giolitti had hoped to use fascism as a counterweight to the forces of revolution, but he had not understood, any more than the left had, what was afoot in Italy. Giolitti, too, had to be counted among the victims of fascism, Serrati thought. Because of their "rhetorical infatuation with revolution" the Socialists had done much to create a reactionary situation: "The bourgeoisie, frightened by our baying, is biting and biting hard." In other words, Turati was right and Gramsci was wrong.²⁸

Gramsci had as little use for Serrati's analysis of the Fascist threat as he did for Turati's. No Italian political figure, including Mussolini, took more abuse in *L'Ordine Nuovo* than Serrati, "the demagogic parrot." Gramsci gave Turati credit for consistency: he began with a re-

formist premise and ended with a reformist conclusion. Serrati, in contrast, managed to begin with a revolutionary premise, only to conclude, à la Turati, that the time for revolution was not yet. Serrati also called himself a Leninist and enjoyed the reputation of being “the Italian Lenin.” All the same, he balked at accepting the Twenty-One Conditions of the Third International. Such a confused man should never be entrusted with the responsibility of leading the Italian proletariat in its war against the class enemy, Gramsci asserted. Under Serrati’s opportunistic leadership, the maximalist Socialists had become “the party of compromise” at precisely the moment when the proletariat stood in need of decisive revolutionary leadership. The Serrati-led Socialist party was “destined to become the world example of the catastrophe of revolutionary phraseology embodied in theoretical ignorance and practical impotence.” Helpless before the reactionary terror and the offensive of the bosses, the Socialists would be reviled in history because of “the pernicious influence of these evil shepherds.”²⁹

Gramsci held up the Communist party as the shining example of perfect fidelity to the Third International. At the behest of Lenin, the party had set out to organize “the healthy and vigorous energies of our people, and we will accomplish this our duty to the end, until our last breath.” The Communists proposed forthrightly “to lead the people in arms to their liberty.” The party always had before it the exemplar of “the Russia of the Soviets, the glorious republic of worker and peasant councils, resisting without ever faltering before the ferocious attacks of the bourgeois Holy Alliance.” Gramsci hailed the Bolshevik Revolution as an experiment that had validated Marx’s central political insight: “The dictatorship of the Communist party does not frighten the masses because [they] understand that this *terrible dictatorship* is the maximum guarantee of their liberty; it is the maximum guarantee against betrayals and frauds.” He continued to deny that the Soviet secret police were engaged in a systematic campaign of terror. All such reports he ascribed to “this plot of the Anglo-German plutocracy against the State of the workers and peasants.” The Communists, now “the party of the great masses,” wanted to conduct the same kind of experiment in Italy.³⁰

Gramsci’s estimate of fascism, as reported in *L’Ordine Nuovo*, does not entitle him to high marks as a political analyst of this phenomenon. Turati and Serrati had a much clearer understanding of what the

left was up against in 1921 and 1922. Gramsci discounted fascism as “the insurrection of the lowest stratum of the Italian bourgeoisie, the stratum of do-nothings, of the ignorant, of the adventurers to whom the war has given the illusion of being good for something and of counting for something.” He underestimated fascism’s power and its appeal across a broad spectrum of interest groups and the general population. In addition, he erroneously dismissed Mussolini as a figure of no long-term consequence. In August 1921 Gramsci thought that the “indecisive” Mussolini was slipping and that fascism soon would liberate itself from him. Gramsci made a distinction between reactionary agrarian and relatively moderate urban fascism. He judged that Mussolini only had control of the latter and could never gain control of the former. It seemed to Gramsci that as fascism fulfilled its destiny as a purely reactionary force, the movement would come apart and Mussolini would fall by the wayside.³¹

Thinking that the Communists by themselves could vanquish fascism provided they adhered to the Bolshevik model, Gramsci helped Bordiga to guide the Italian Communists along a disastrous course of isolationism. Indeed, he played a leading role in identifying all the Socialists as objective allies of the Fascists: “It is a political law demonstrated by all historical experience that when a party born in the proletarian camp fights another proletarian party to its left, the first one unfailingly falls into the arms of reaction and the worst elements of counterrevolution.”³²

In May 1922, after nearly eleven years in Turin, Gramsci left the city and his job as editor of *L'Ordine Nuovo*. Exhausted and sick, he arrived in Moscow and saw with his own eyes the New Zion being built in the Soviet Union. That July he met Julia Schucht, a young violinist who had spent many years in Italy with her family and, like him, suffered from infirm health. They met in a sanatorium. He was then 31, she 26. They fell in love and married, and Gramsci experienced the happiest moments in his pain-ravaged and emotionally deprived life. Two sons soon were born to them, and Gramsci delighted in his unexpected and un-hoped-for role as a father.

While in Moscow, Gramsci worked on the Executive Committee of the Third International. He was still living there when the Fascist March on Rome occurred in late October 1922 and thus escaped the dragnet that landed many Italian Communists—including Bordiga—

in jail. To help the Committee track the difficult situation in Italy, Gramsci was sent to Vienna in November 1923. While on assignment there he began to detect a change in Julia's attitude toward him, a discovery that caused him great pain and anxiety. At the same time, he worried about developments in both Russia and Italy. All of his predictions about the inevitable disintegration of fascism and the marginalization of Mussolini had been blasted by events. In Russia, Lenin's death on 21 January 1924 gave Stalin his long coveted opportunity to assert himself as the paramount leader of the Bolshevik party. From the beginning of the post-Lenin period, Gramsci expressed concern to his intimates about Stalin.

The New Order, Third Series

At about this time Palmiro Togliatti pressed the Comintern to send Gramsci back to Italy to help the party regroup. In particular, Togliatti insisted, Gramsci's talents as a journalist were sorely needed. While still in Vienna in late 1923, Gramsci began to make preparations for a new incarnation of *L'Ordine Nuovo*. He fervently wanted the periodical's third series to be a cultural journal similar to the first series and to function as the voice of the Comintern in Italy. Gramsci's involvement in the inner councils of the Comintern had had a moderating effect on his views. He became increasingly critical of the Italian tendency to profess formal obedience to Comintern directives while doing everything possible to subvert them. Convinced that Bordiga's sect mentality had done incalculable damage to the revolutionary cause in Italy, Gramsci resolved to make the launching of his new journal the occasion for a complete rapprochement between the Comintern and the party. His resolve did not pass unnoticed by Comintern leaders, who began to think of him as a potential replacement for the irritating and insubordinate Bordiga.

Protected by parliamentary immunity after his triumph, *in absentia*, in the parliamentary elections of April, Gramsci returned to Italy the following month. Despite worsening health, he brought immense energy and buoyant optimism to his task as the editor of *L'Ordine Nuovo*. Gramsci made much of Lenin's praise for the original series as "the only current in the Socialist party that faithfully represented the International in Italy." With the third series, Gramsci wanted to continue

“the tradition of [being] the faithful and integral interpreter of the Communist International’s program.” The Communists, dispirited and harried from the public arena by Fascist repression, had to be re-organized.³³

Gramsci wanted to begin the campaign of renewal by revitalizing the party’s presence in the factories: “All the problems of factory organization will therefore be repropounded for discussion by us because only by means of a potent organization of the proletariat, achieved by all possible methods in a regime of reaction, can the campaign for worker and peasant government not transform itself into a repetition of the . . . occupation of the factories.”³⁴ Gramsci now recognized this occupation as an emotionally satisfying but politically disastrous gesture that had led nowhere. In the future the proletariat would have to be guided by a Communist party with the theoretical capacity to formulate a practical Marxist-Leninist plan of revolution and the disciplined will to execute it.

A crisis decisive in its ultimately devastating impact befell the anti-fascist opposition, especially the Communists, with the murder of Giacomo Matteotti on 10 June 1924. Matteotti had followed Turati to the right-wing margins of the Socialist left. In the very month of the Fascist takeover, October 1922, Serrati’s maximalists had expelled Turati’s reformists, giving rise to the Partito Socialista Unitario of which Matteotti became the secretary. He fearlessly attacked the regime and complained to Turati about the failure of their party to fight fascism effectively. Matteotti thought he was wasting his time as the secretary of such a feckless group. To Turati he wrote about their fellow reformists: “They want nothing because they are nothing. I do not intend anymore to be a witness at a funeral. I am looking for life. I want to fight fascism. To win this fight it is necessary to intensify it. We need men of will, not skeptics.”³⁵ For his outspokenness against the regime, the Fascists murdered him.

The assassination of Matteotti caused a sensation in Italy and, initially, staggered the Fascist regime. Gramsci could not mourn him as a friend to communism. Indeed, Matteotti had expressed as much fear and loathing of the Communists as of the Fascists. He had shared Turati’s abhorrence of the Comintern but had seen that fascism was the greater evil of the moment. He had held fascism in utter contempt because of its monstrous pretensions as a force for order when in fact

its essence consisted of nothing but “the abuse of power” and the systematic suspension of due process. Communism Matteotti had seen as “the involuntary accomplice of fascism.” By destroying the left’s unity, the Communists had facilitated the Fascist takeover. Worse still, the two ideologies had much more in common than either wanted to admit: “The violence of the dictatorship preached by the one becomes the pretext and the justification of the violence of the actual dictatorship of the other.” He had thought communism a reprehensible and “insidious” force in Italy.³⁶

At first Gramsci expected that the assassination would destroy the regime. The petit-bourgeois base of the Fascist party seemed to be flaking away as “the moral revolt of the entire population against fascism” intensified. To the amazement of many who lazily and unobservantly had esteemed Mussolini as the upholder of law and order, the gangster side of fascism now stood revealed. Everybody knew that Mussolini had ordered or at least countenanced Matteotti’s murder. Claiming that parliamentary methods would not work against an armed dictatorship, Gramsci called for direct action against the regime. The working class would have to lead the way in this decisive moment: “The fact that nonworker forces are joining the antifascist front does not change our conviction [regarding] the guiding role [of the proletariat] in this struggle.” He had a very clear sense of the Communists’ superiority over all the other antifascist parties, including “the impotent crybaby social democrats,” and continued to oppose all proposals for a united front against the regime. Gramsci wanted the other parties to fall in behind the Communist party, not side by side with it.³⁷

In an August 1924 report to the Central Committee of the Communist party, Gramsci claimed that the Fascist regime had entered its death agony. Not only had the Fascists been taken aback by the moral revulsion that their murder of Matteotti had inspired, but in general political terms Mussolini had failed on all fronts, according to Gramsci. Devised as a control system for certain manifestations of the international crisis of capitalism produced by the war, fascism was “petting out and dying precisely because it has not maintained any of its promises.” Far from relieving the crisis of capitalism in Italy, fascism had accelerated it. “The wave of indignation inspired by the Matteotti crime” now would sweep the detritus of fascism away.³⁸

Gramsci still could not take Mussolini seriously. To him the Fascist

leader was not a vital element of national life “but a phenomenon of country folklore, destined to pass into history as just another provincial Italian mask-character.” Mussolini, the grotesque and absurd Punchinello puppet of his capitalist masters, could not be the ruler of Italy. His movement itself existed only as a political mirage: “The truth is that fascism does not have an essence.” It had emerged as a makeshift framework for certain retrograde political forces whose configuration and needs already had changed. Gramsci thought that the Matteotti crisis would be the perfect opportunity for the capitalists to get rid of Mussolini, and he had no doubt that they would do it.³⁹

The workers had to position themselves to take advantage of Mussolini’s distress and the fluctuating situation of his sponsors in the Italian establishment, Gramsci counseled. The Matteotti crisis had brought to a head “the historic crisis of Italian capitalist society whose economic system reveals itself to be insufficient for the needs of the population.” To profit from the crisis, the party first had to secure the loyalty of the majority of the workers. Thus, “the phase we are now passing through is not that of the direct struggle for power, but a preparatory phase, of transition to the struggle for power, a phase, in short, of agitation, of propaganda, of organization.” Gramsci would brook no disobedience from party extremists like Bordiga: “If there exist in our party groups and tendencies that out of fanaticism want to force the situation it will be necessary to fight them in the name of the entire party, of the vital and permanent interests of the Italian proletarian revolution.”⁴⁰

Gramsci told the Central Committee that the road ahead would be full of pitfalls for the party. After three years of Fascist terrorism and oppression, the masses had become “prudent.” Their prudence had manifested itself in a heightened support for reformism and maximalism on the left. The Communist option of revolution had relatively few supporters now, but Gramsci felt certain that this situation would soon change in favor of the party. Meanwhile, the Communists had to be patient. The key to success for them would be organization. He wanted every factory and village to have a Communist cell. Thus organized, the Communists would be able to defeat “not only the fascism of Mussolini and Farinacci, but also the semifascism of Amendola, Sturzo, and Turati.”⁴¹ Gramsci held that liberal democrats like Giovanni Amendola, Christian Democrats like Luigi Sturzo, and Socialist reformists like Turati were outside the Church of Marxist-Le-

ninism and, therefore, beyond salvation. He showed a little more kindness to Serrati the maximalist, whom he merely called a fool.

As the Matteotti crisis raged in Italy, the fifth congress of the Comintern met in Moscow. It was the first such congress after Lenin's death, which had left a great void in the Comintern. It drew 406 delegates from 41 countries and 51 parties, including 12 from Italy.⁴² Gramsci had intended to be there, but decided at the last minute to stay behind in Italy because of the Matteotti crisis. The congress resolved to press ahead with the complete Bolshevization of all member parties. Anything anomalous to Bolshevism would have to be eliminated. The congress further resolved that fascism and social democracy came to the same thing, the first in subjective support of the bourgeoisie and the second in objective support of it. As for strictly Italian matters, Bordiga's group was frozen out of the leadership cadre. The influence of Bordiga rapidly declined because of the unrelenting hostility of the Comintern.

Back in Rome, Gramsci interpreted the directives of the fifth congress as a license for open season on both factions of the Socialist party, the *serratiani* and the *turatiani*. He played an essentially obstructionist role in the June 1924–January 1925 antifascist boycott of parliament known as the Aventine Secession. The boycott failed for many reasons, chief among them the inability of the parties involved to agree on strategy or tactics. Mussolini simply waited out the opposition parties, knowing that sooner or later their historic feuds and proclivity for bickering would be the end of the Aventine Secession. Events unfolded as Mussolini predicted they would. Gramsci mistakenly believed that the Communists would be able to fight fascism by themselves. He refused to work with the other left-wing parties, and the Communist party was the first to break ranks in the Aventine coalition and return to parliament. *Avanti!* declared the Communists' return to be an immense favor to Mussolini.

Well into the autumn of 1924, Gramsci continued to predict that the contradictions of fascism would soon catch up with it and destroy the regime. Despite all the reverses suffered by the Communist party, Gramsci was still devising strategy on the assumption that Mussolini's fall was inevitable. The contradictions of communism, however, proved to be more serious in the short term. In October 1924 Trotsky published *Lessons of October*; a scathing denunciation of the post-Lenin

policies of the Comintern that originally appeared as the introduction to a two-volume collection of his writings entitled *1917*. Though he never mentioned his hated rival, Stalin, by name, everyone knew the identity of Trotsky's main target in the book, which created a huge scandal in the communist world.

In opposing Stalin, Trotsky did not develop a theoretical alternative to Stalinism. They clashed over tactics, personality issues, and power—not over theory. Both men quite rightly claimed to be operating entirely within the sphere of theoretical Leninism. Neither questioned the role of the dictatorship of the proletariat as the be-all and end-all of the Marxist-Leninist political system. When Trotsky wrote about the Social Democrats, he sounded exactly like Stalin. Trotsky, too, dismissed social democracy as nothing but opportunism and as a leading cause of the universal failure of revolution in the West. The principal lesson of October was that without a strong and united Communist party “the proletarian revolution cannot conquer.”⁴³ Lacking such strength and unity, the European Communist parties had dithered in the face of a golden revolutionary opportunity.

Responsibility for the failure of communism in the West lay with the party leaders there but also with the Comintern, which had been insufficiently Bolshevized. Trotsky defined Bolshevism as “not merely a doctrine, but a system of revolutionary training for the proletarian upheaval.” To Bolshevize Communist parties was to give them such training. As Trotsky scanned the roster of the world's revolutionary movements, he professed to be unable to see the effects of Bolshevization. The Comintern had become stalled under its present leadership. The leaders were reacting to revolution as if it were “an endless film,” as if delay were not a crime. For his rebuttal to the standpatters in the Comintern, Trotsky claimed to be able to do no better than to quote Lenin: “History will never forgive the procrastination of revolutionists.”⁴⁴

The Italian allies of Trotsky and Stalin quickly got caught up in the short, intense Bolshevik power struggle. Though critical of Stalin, Gramsci supported him throughout the succession crisis. Bordiga supported Trotsky, even to the point of calling for the Italian Communist party to withdraw from the Third International. On the issue of loyalty to the Third International the whole question of who would lead the Italian Communist party turned.

The Clash with Bordiga

Trotsky's *Lessons of October* strongly reinforced Bordiga's ideas about revolution. The secretary of the Italian Communist party had been increasingly critical of the Comintern throughout 1923, most of which he had spent in prison. During the nine months of his confinement, Togliatti and Terracini had run the party, but they remained faithful to him. Upon regaining his freedom in October of that year, he had called for the Italian Communist party to break with the Comintern over its increasingly reformist policies. Togliatti and Terracini initially supported him, but Gramsci did not. Soon Gramsci had Togliatti and Terracini with him. At this point the Russians decided to remove Bordiga from his position as party secretary because they wanted someone who would support the Comintern's policies "not only out of discipline, but from conviction."⁴⁵ Ousted from the party's leadership position, Bordiga returned to Naples, where he briefly edited *Prometeo*, a theoretical periodical. He tried to rally support for his cause, but the inflexible opposition of the Comintern defeated him. By the end of 1924, the once undisputed leader of the Partito Comunista d'Italia had been reduced to being the chief of a mere faction of steadily declining importance.

Gramsci moved into the party's leadership vacuum. He became the compromise "centrist" candidate for the secretaryship between the leftist Bordiga and the rightist Tasca, who most fully embraced the Comintern's united front policy against fascism. The real differences between Tasca and Gramsci on the Comintern amounted to very little on the central issue of who would be in charge. Moreover, Gramsci possessed an intellectual standing in the Italian Communist party that no one else came close to matching. He was the obvious choice for the secretary's job.

Bordiga did not go quietly to political oblivion. At the pivotal moment of transition from his secretaryship to that of Gramsci, the issues between the two men boiled down to their differences over the so-called Trotsky case. With Bordiga supporting Trotsky, Gramsci left his readers in no doubt about where *L'Ordine Nuovo* stood. On 19 November 1924, in an article entitled "How One Must Not Write the History of the Bolshevik Revolution," Gramsci seconded the Comintern's denunciation of Trotsky's "opportunistic and petit-bourgeois" op-

position policies.⁴⁶ About *Lessons of October* in particular, *Pravda* and Gramsci agreed that it was a work of dangerous revisionism. Gramsci, echoing the official newspaper of the Russian Communist party, criticized Trotsky for presenting a distorted view of Lenin and the Bolshevik Revolution. The official party line, which Gramsci dutifully repeated for the benefit of Italian Communists, held that in writing *Lessons of October* Trotsky had given aid and comfort to all the enemies of communism.

The “Trotsky case” divided Italian Communists just when the Fascist regime began to recover its balance after the Matteotti crisis and the Aventine Secession. Mussolini’s speech to parliament on 3 January 1925 signaled the passage of the Fascists to the offensive. The Fascist police arrested more than one hundred known subversives, many of them Communists, and closed down numerous Communist associations and sections. Unlike the dragnet of the infamous “year zero” in 1923, however, this one affected all opposition parties, not just the Communists. *L’Unità*, the daily Communist newspaper, suffered many sequestrations, but so did other opposition papers. Spriano calls the wave of repression that began on 3 January 1925 a coup d’état, “the end of the ‘Liberal State.’”⁴⁷ Some freedom continued to exist for another two years, but only in circumstances increasingly inimical to it. By 1927 freedom of the press and of association had practically disappeared in Fascist Italy, and all this while the regime singled out Communists for special surveillance and punishment. Only in parliament itself could the Communists continue their attacks on Mussolini, and even there the atmosphere became increasingly threatening after January 1925.

At a 6 February 1925 meeting of the Central Committee, where Gramsci professed his faith in the coming proletarian revolution in Italy, the Trotsky case dominated the discussion. Gramsci linked Bordiga to Trotsky, and for the next several months the two Italian Communist leaders traded charges and countercharges. To Bordiga the Italian party simply had become a tool of the revisionist Comintern. Gramsci condemned *bordighismo* as a divisive force emanating from the extreme left that kept the party from Bolshevizing itself properly. Bordiga identified himself as a Trotskyite, which in the parlance of the time meant that he wholeheartedly supported the idea of immediate world revolution for communism. Gramsci took the side of

the Comintern leadership that then included Lev Kamenev, Nikolai Bukharin, Grigori Zinoviev, and Joseph Stalin; they all agreed that the task of building up communism in Russia took priority over the worldwide revolution.

On 7 June 1925 Gramsci described Bordiga's thesis as "an unhealthy initiative" liable to plunge the party into an "extremely damaging and dangerous struggle of factions." Without the most rigid party discipline, involving more than anything else complete fidelity to the policies of the Comintern, all would be lost. The Bordiga faction already had committed "the most audacious offense against the most elementary norms of organization and discipline of a communist party." Now they were propelling the party toward schism. Gramsci urged faithful party members to resist all attempts "to compromise and to weaken the internal cohesion and organizational solidity of the revolutionary vanguard organized in the Communist party." He reasoned: "To place oneself outside the party and the International means to place oneself against the Communist party and the International; it means thus to strengthen the elements of counterrevolution."⁴⁸

It saddened Gramsci to think that in the ranks of the fomenters of dissension "we find the names of comrades who were with us among the founders of the party and for it fought and worked." In his mind, the interest of the party took precedence over every other consideration. "Friendships, personal ties, and the most tenacious and profound bonds of affection" could not and would not deflect the true Communist from his overarching duty to the party. Gramsci emphasized the primary importance of obedience to organizational discipline "because in our party up to now sentimental factors have had too much influence." To create "a true Bolshevik party," the Italians would have to overcome this weakness.⁴⁹

During the summer and fall of 1925, Gramsci energetically opposed Bordiga-inspired factionalism. He preached "full and complete submission to the discipline of the Communist International" and exhorted party members to look to the history of the Bolshevik party for guidance. Lenin, too, had faced opposition from false Communists: "The history of the Russian Bolshevik party teaches us how it is necessary to struggle against these deviations of the right and left." The Italian Communist party now found itself beset by the same problems.⁵⁰

Gramsci identified Bordiga as the ringleader of a faction known as

the Comitato d'intesa di sinistra (Committee of Left-Wing Accord), headquartered in Naples. Their ideas, Gramsci asserted, were "an accumulation of errors and quite ridiculous affirmations." He claimed that *bordighismo* was entirely misconceived: "In it there is nothing new and original. One is dealing here with an undigested mass of ancient misconceptions and deviations from Marxism that can attain 'originality' only to him who does not know the history of the worker movement." Bordiga's attempts to explain his position revealed only a pitiable "intellectual decadence." His argument boiled down to the claim that the opposition within the party should have the right "to be able to injure, to defame, to calumniate without having their injuries, defamations, and calumnies exposed." Trotsky had claimed the same right in the Russian Bolshevik party. All that Gramsci could see coming out of the "individualism" of Bordiga and Trotsky was additional ammunition for those who wanted to destroy the International, the very bond on which the success of world communism depended. About Bordiga in particular, Gramsci wrote: "To limit oneself, as he does, to sowing doubt, skepticism, and mistrust without indicating anything positively constructive, this not only constitutes a lack of character but likewise reveals scarce respect for and attachment to the party and the International."⁵¹

The climax of Gramsci's campaign against Bordiga occurred at the clandestine third congress of the Italian Communist party, held in the French city of Lyons from 20 to 26 January 1926. The Communists, still twenty-seven to twenty-eight thousand strong at the end of 1925, held pre-congress meetings all over Italy in country inns, out-of-the-way farmhouses, and open fields. The Bordiga faction argued for a course independent of the Comintern and did so on essentially Trotskyite grounds. Gramsci and his representatives used these meetings to advance the Bolshevikization agenda. For him the Soviet Union sparkled with the radiance of a thousand suns, and in his heliocentric theory of world communism the Italian Communist party should revolve around the Comintern. Spriano calls the ensuing Lyons Theses, which faithfully reflected the Soviet viewpoint of how the communist universe should be ordered, "the landing place of the theoretical-political elaboration of the Gramsci secretaryship."⁵² Bordiga tried to gain recognition for the importance of Italy's native revolutionary traditions, but Gramsci carried the congress with his pro-Comintern line.

Under Gramsci, the party would seek to execute the will of the Comintern in Italy.

Gramsci won a complete triumph over Bordiga in Lyons, but in the greater scheme of things the Italian Communist party was heading toward disaster. The Fascist regime now resolved to destroy the party completely, and within months after the Lyons congress most of the delegates were either in jail or in exile. Party membership fell to fifteen thousand in 1926.⁵³ The police arrested Gramsci on 8 November. He and thousands of other Communists fell victim to the special anti-terrorist legislation adopted after the 31 October discovery of the plot to kill Mussolini by Tito Zaniboni, a militant Socialist. The regime's Special Tribunal would sentence 4,030 Communists to 23,000 years of prison time.⁵⁴ After the crackdown, Togliatti led the party until his death in 1964. Togliatti would have suffered imprisonment as well had he not been in Russia at the time representing Italy on the Executive Committee of the Comintern.

When the door of the Fascist prison slammed shut on Gramsci, he became lost to the party as a leader, but a whole new career opened up to him, that of world-class intellectual. His lofty reputation today as a theorist arose from the instant and permanent success of the *Quaderni del carcere*. In that work Gramsci made an attempt to formulate an original Marxist ideology, the popularity of which today constitutes one of Marxism's few remaining vital life signs.

Gramsci's biographer Giuseppe Fiori singles out the 1926 essay "Alcuni temi della questione meridionale" (Some Themes on the Southern Question) as the transitional point between "the journalism of the years of struggle and the meditative phase of the prison period."⁵⁵ Gramsci was working on this piece at the time of his arrest. Unfinished, it did not appear in print until 1930 after Gramsci's Communist colleague Camilla Ravera found it among his papers. The significance of this piece does not stem from its subject matter. The South had never been absent from the Sardinian's consciousness, and he had written often about the region. Moreover, in his maiden speech before parliament, on 16 May 1925, he had spoken about the South with a native son's fervor. Fiori, however, rightly draws our attention to Gramsci's change of tone in the 1926 essay. He seemed to be aiming

here, according to the biographer, at something with more depth than the party propaganda he was used to writing.

Gramsci contended in this seminal essay that the problems of the South would have to be understood in a Marxist way before they could be solved. The traditional intellectuals who had presented the most influential theories about the South saw the region in the light of liberalism and thus had contributed to the problems, not to their solution. He singled out Benedetto Croce and Giustino Fortunato as “the two greatest figures of the Italian reaction.” They had created the intellectual justification for the exploitative status quo, which required not Hegelian intellectualizing or reform ideas but Marxist revolution. The proletariat needed its own intellectuals, who would “adhere to its program and its doctrine.” The Liberals had Croce and Fortunato, but the proletariat had *L’Ordine Nuovo*, which signaled a new departure in the cultural politics of Italy: the emergence of the revolution’s “organic” intellectuals. Gramsci described these organic intellectuals as a group of politically engaged writers who grew out of the proletariat and felt themselves to be an integral part of it as its advocates and champions. He thought that the proletariat had to demonstrate “its capacity to break up the intellectual bloc that is the flexible but most resistant armor of the agrarian bloc.”⁵⁶

By challenging the ideas, values, and belief systems of the bourgeoisie’s traditional intellectuals, the organic intellectuals of the proletariat would strike a revolutionary blow against the status quo. In Gramsci’s theory of revolution, the fortress of culture commanded the heights overlooking the plain on which the final military engagement would be fought between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. The side that controlled this fortress would win the battle. Here the manuscript broke off, but Gramsci would get to write a three-thousand-page addendum to it in *The Prison Notebooks*.

Palmiro Togliatti: The Revolutionary as Cultural Impresario

History has never known industrial construction on such a gigantic scale, such enthusiasm for new developments, such labour heroism on the part of the working-class millions.

—Joseph Stalin et al., *The Short Course*

On 14 October 1926, three weeks before his arrest, Gramsci wrote a long letter to the Central Committee of the Russian Communist party. Alarmed by reports coming out of Russia about the party's raging internal rivalry between the Stalin-Bukharin and the Trotsky-Zinoviev-Kamenev factions, Gramsci tried to calm the situation. In the past, he began, "we were sure, notwithstanding the bitterness of the polemics, that the unity of the Russian Party was not in danger."¹ With the latest news, however, an anguished Gramsci feared the international repercussions of the factional strife in Russia. The party had to control the damage in a way consistent with Leninism. Obviously, party discipline had to be preserved at all costs. Thus, Gramsci gave his full support to the Stalin-led majority on the Central Committee and urged all Communists to do the same. He accused the Trotsky-led minority of the factionalism that Lenin always had deplored in the party.

Nevertheless, Gramsci insisted that "unity and discipline in this case cannot be mechanical and forced; they must arise from loyalty and from conviction."² Gramsci revealed in this letter that he did not have what it took to enter into the spirit of Stalinism. He thought that discussions within the party had to be free and open. Once the party had made a decision, all discussion had to end, but Gramsci seriously believed in something like a democratic process for Communists. With equal seriousness, he believed that no one else in society needed or merited democracy. He assumed, as Lenin did, that in a real democracy everyone would be a Communist anyway.

Gramsci concluded his passionate entreaty to the Central Committee with a plea for mercy. He claimed to be speaking for the Italian Communists in the “spirit of brothers,” mindful that they were “younger brothers.” In that spirit, he begged the victorious majority on the Central Committee to respect the rights of the vanquished minority. Trotsky and his allies in this quarrel “had contributed powerfully to educate us for the revolution, they had corrected us energetically and severely, they had been our teachers.” Such revolutionary heroes did not deserve to be crushed. Therefore, Gramsci wanted to be sure that “the majority does not intend to abuse its victory in the struggle and is disposed to avoid excessive measures.” A vindictive resolution would lead to a schism that might be “irreparable and fatal.”³

Gramsci’s letter did not reach its destination. Palmiro Togliatti, stationed in Moscow and securely in the Stalin camp, judged the letter to be inopportune and did not pass it on to the Central Committee. Gramsci’s successor as the secretary of the Italian Communist party thought that the situation in Russia called for the rigor to which Stalin wanted to subject Trotsky and the others. In Togliatti, Stalin would find the kind of fully cooperative ally that Gramsci never could be. Togliatti’s nickname, “Il Migliore” (the Best), has a very ironic meaning in the context of the long Stalinist phase of the Marxist revolutionary tradition in Italy.

Italian Communists, led by Togliatti, played a leading part in presenting Stalinism as a panacea for the West’s ills. They did so, however, without the collaboration of Gramsci, whose worst fears for the party had come to pass. Then immured in a Fascist prison, he began a long and still not completely understood process of disengagement from the Stalinist hierarchy of Soviet communism. With Togliatti’s total subservience to Stalinism, this process became extended to the Italian Communist party.⁴ Doubly afflicted, by fascism and Stalinist communism, Gramsci became a figure of high pathos, and his image today as the Sant’Antonio of Marxism with a human face arises as much from the compelling existential drama of his life in prison as from the intellectual brilliance of the *Prison Notebooks*.

Togliatti has a quite different image. In what is still the most balanced biography of Togliatti, Giorgio Bocca stresses the decisive importance

of the Communist leader's northern background. He was born in Genoa on 26 March 1893, but his personality seemed even more northern. Bocca gives as one of Togliatti's defining characteristics a "seriousness that we could call Piedmontese."⁵ He grew up in a middle-class home and went to church every Sunday with his parents, two brothers, and sister. His father worked as a government bureaucrat and had numerous postings, the last one in Sassari, Sardinia, where he died at the age of 59 in 1911. To his children he always stressed the importance of education, and they all obtained university degrees. Young Palmiro, especially, excelled academically. Like Gramsci, his classmate at the University of Turin, he won a state scholarship based on merit. Unlike Gramsci, he finished his university course work and did not allow politics to interfere with school.

Togliatti came to socialism early, but without the frenzy of a religious experience. He did have socialist teachers who influenced him. Professional ambition, however, not politics, drove him during his university years. Though he clearly belonged to the left, Bocca describes his pre-war socialism as "generic and of the protest [*protestatario*] variety."⁶ He joined the Socialist party in 1914 without taking an active role. On the sidelines of left-wing politics, Togliatti followed Gramsci's lead and developed an ideological crush on Mussolini, whose interventionist line of reasoning swayed them both. In a matter of months Gramsci freed himself from the spell of Mussolini, but in Togliatti's case the attraction continued for some years.

Extreme nearsightedness kept Togliatti out of the army until April 1916, when the growing need for manpower resulted in a lowering of standards. Prior to his enlistment he worked as a nurse volunteer for the Red Cross. As evidence of the seriousness and tenacity of Togliatti's interventionist beliefs, Bocca makes much of his participation in an officers' training program: "To ask to become an officer is to ask to participate with greater responsibility in the war."⁷ Before being commissioned, though, Togliatti fell ill from the residual effects of a childhood attack of pleurisy and was invalided out of the army. He returned to Turin, completed his university examinations with distinction, and reestablished contact with Gramsci, who by this time was editing *Il Grido del Popolo*. Still far from being a political activist, Togliatti began to write theoretically eclectic articles on economics, which Gramsci published. Marxism did not yet play a serious role in his philosophy.

At about the time when *L'Ordine Nuovo* was launched, in 1919, Gramsci served as the conduit for Marxist-Leninism into Togliatti's thinking. Lenin's *State and Revolution* made a powerful impression on Togliatti. He and Gramsci joined forces in the internal disputes of the *ordinovisti* and helped to lead the way in the Leninization of the Socialist party's extreme left. Although Togliatti had gifts of his own as a journalist and an organizer, he followed Gramsci through all the vicissitudes of the Socialist party's disintegration and the formation of the Italian Communist party (PCI). He did miss out on the PCI's founding congress in Livorno because of Gramsci's need to have him in the editorial offices of *L'Ordine Nuovo*. Togliatti remained enamored of Bordiga longer than Gramsci did but in the end followed his friend in this dispute as well.

The two friends eventually quarreled over Stalinism. Togliatti had gone to Moscow in June 1924 as a representative of the PCI to the Comintern, the same year that he married an Italian Jewish woman of strong Marxist convictions, Rita Montagnana. Togliatti immediately had understood the real dynamics of Bolshevism. According to him, a Communist had to be concerned about being on the right side of a struggle, not about the manner in which the wrong side should be treated. Togliatti prided himself on his realism.

The situation of the Italian Communist party obliged him to support the Stalin faction without asking too many questions. In 1926 the party lost one-third of its members and appeared to be en route to extinction. Indeed, in 1927 the party came close to dissolving itself and, according to Paolo Spriano, "for some months 'disappeared' in Italy."⁸ With the PCI falling apart and virtually defenseless, help from the Comintern became indispensable. After 1928 Stalin controlled the Comintern completely. Thus, the Italian party's plight led Togliatti to the only choice he had as a Communist. Without the financial and political support that Stalin provided there would have been no Italian Communist party. What followed was a classic demonstration of the axiom in politics that he who pays the piper calls the tune. In time, necessities became virtues, and no party would be more wedded to the cult of Stalin than the PCI.

Exiled with his wife and son in Paris during the late 1920s and early 1930s, Togliatti traveled often to the Soviet Union for party congresses and won Stalin's confidence by showing himself to be whole-heartedly devoted to the "socialism in one country" policy. In the precise man-

ner of Stalin, he described the Soviet Union as the active element in mobilizing the revolutionary forces of the world. As PCI chief after Gramsci's imprisonment in 1926 and as editor of the party's most important journal in these years, the Paris-based *Stato Operaio*, Togliatti attacked Trotsky and his allies, particularly Bordiga, as deviationists of the right who had misunderstood Lenin and were hardly better than social democrats. Lev Kamenev had tried to make a Gramsci-like argument that Communists should have the right to present and to defend their ideas, and Togliatti dismissed him as another misguided opponent of Stalin's healthy and vibrant policies. If Gramsci had aspired to be the perfect Leninist, by all the most reliable accounts of the time Togliatti succeeded in being the perfect Stalinist.

Togliatti also made common cause with Stalin in the Comintern's campaign against social democracy or what the two men preferred to call "social fascism." At the Comintern's sixth congress, held during the summer of 1928, Stalin condemned social democracy as a pro-fascist force in the world. He added that by detaching many workers from communism—the only valid alternative to fascism—the social democrats were even worse than the Fascists. Stalin succeeded in persuading the Comintern to label social democracy as the absolute antithesis to communism and as the most dangerous source of capitalism's machinations against the Soviet dictatorship of the proletariat. Stalin's tirades at the sixth congress against the evils of the non-Communist left widened the chasm of hostility between social democrats and Communists just as Nazism was about to make its move from the political bottom lands to the pinnacles of power in Germany.⁹

Until Stalin changed his mind about social democracy, during the Popular Front years of the mid-1930s, Togliatti dutifully went along with the decisions of the sixth congress. At first he tried to steer a middle course between Stalin and Bukharin, whose turn for proscription came soon after the defeat of Trotsky. The reality of the situation, however, kept pushing Togliatti back to Stalin's corner. Through every shift of Soviet politics Stalin's power grew. Togliatti developed a faith in Stalin that began as a consequence of his awe before the Soviet leader's adeptness as a Communist politician, and the fifteen years he spent in Moscow confirmed this first impression.

Not all Italian Communists reacted to Stalin the way Togliatti did, and between 1929 and 1931 six major party figures suffered expulsion: Angelo Tasca, Amadeo Bordiga, Alfonso Leonetti, Pietro Tresso, Paolo

Ravazzoli, and Ignazio Silone. Togliatti played a determining role in all of these cases. Tasca was driven out as an “opportunist” after criticizing Stalin for insanely dividing the left into warring social democratic and communist factions. Togliatti personally proposed the expulsion of Bordiga for his open solidarity with Trotsky. The same fate befell Leonetti, Tresso and Ravazzoli, who also had spoken out against the Soviet leader on their way to joining the Trotskyite camp.¹⁰ Though Silone did not become a Trotskyite, he, too, fell afoul of the party over his horror at what he called the cynical lying, the despicable manufacturing of evidence, and the pathological politicization that undermined Trotsky, as well as at the rot seeping out from the dictatorship and the International into the whole of society.¹¹

Despite Togliatti’s cooperation in the expulsions of the six anti-Stalinists, these cases put the entire Italian Communist party in bad odor with Stalin. Togliatti had to prove to him that the PCI did not harbor numerous other opportunists as well. In Moscow the Italians had a reputation for slipperiness, hypercriticism, and general unreliability. Togliatti set out to establish a new reputation for the Italian party as the most loyal and dependable component in the Comintern. He used the argument of wartime necessity to explain his absolute support of Stalin. The rules of war applied to politics, he reasoned. In the war between communism and capitalism, Communists had to line up unquestioningly behind their leader. By this logic, all the Communists who criticized Stalin were no better than defeatists or traitors. The Communist party, Togliatti liked to say, was an army, not a debating society. The stock market crash of October 1929, the Depression, and the meteoric rise of Nazism—as well as the hopelessness of the antifascist cause in Italy—fueled his sense of desperation and heightened his dependence on Stalin as the only hope in the gathering gloom.

Togliatti steadfastly continued to follow the Stalin line, that social democrats and Fascists were indistinguishable. The shattering defeat of the German workers’ movement in 1933, however, dispelled all illusions about the possibility of Communist independence in the fight against Nazism. Hitler demonstrated even to Stalin’s satisfaction the difference between social democracy and Nazism. For the time being nothing more was heard from Stalin about the equivalency of the two systems. The swift collapse and obliteration of the German left forced Stalin to change course, this time in favor of the Popular Front idea.

While loyally following Stalin, Togliatti tried to resuscitate the hopes

of the PCI. His efforts, though, went for nothing. Then entering the period of “consensus,” the Fascist regime enjoyed a greater popularity and support than ever before. In 1934 Togliatti wrote an article on fascism that he later developed into a series of lectures for the Lenin School in Moscow. In them, he tried to expose the Fascists’ methods of control. Togliatti was fully aware of the regime’s real strengths, and Bocca notes that he instructed the comrades still in Italy to treat fascism as “a strong adversary who cannot be attacked frontally.”¹²

The PCI, meanwhile, had sunk to its lowest levels of significance as an opposition force. On the tenth anniversary of the Fascist takeover, the regime released hundreds of Communist prisoners as a sign that it had nothing to fear from the left. Major leaders, like Gramsci, remained in jail, but Mussolini’s expansiveness followed from a correct estimate of communism’s steep decline in Italy. The pro-Communist Spriano concedes that “the general pressure of discontent [seemed] largely diminished.”¹³ Togliatti’s dependence on Stalin for sustaining the PCI continued to grow. Moreover, the unrelieved futility of the Communist opposition in Italy robbed the party of its prestige and made it an object of disdain even in the Comintern. In 1934 Comintern hierarchs vehemently denounced the PCI for allowing itself to be outmaneuvered by the Fascists and relegated to political oblivion. Togliatti, who moved to Moscow that year with his family to take part in the work of the Comintern, meekly submitted to the party’s accusers and presented them with an abject self-criticism full of fervid tributes to Stalin.

Togliatti found consolation in an affair with a married woman named Elena Lebedeva, who worked as a secretary in the Comintern offices. Her husband, Davide Maggioni, would commit suicide in 1937. Although Togliatti’s own marriage remained outwardly stable, his family life deteriorated sharply. His wife, Rita, also worked for the party, and they continued their professional partnership without any real warmth between them. Moreover, their young son, Aldo, began to develop serious emotional and psychological problems. Togliatti, a notorious workaholic, lost emotional contact with the boy and never regained it.¹⁴

Though no longer running the party’s day-to-day operations in Paris, Togliatti remained its real leader. Following Mussolini’s victory over Ethiopia in May 1936, Togliatti’s hopes for a resurrection of the

PCI seemed fainter than ever. So complete was the consensus then forming around fascism that in desperation the Communists tried to effect a rapprochement with the regime. They praised the Fascist program of 1919 as one of peace, liberty, and defense of the workers: if only the clock could be turned back to that first hour when Mussolini's program of social justice had held such promise, perhaps the Communists and the Fascists could work together. Spriano calls this Communist gesture "disconcerting," and it certainly illuminates the thinness of the line between pragmatism and opportunism.¹⁵ The party's opportunistic image, of taking diametrically opposed positions with bewildering suddenness on the fundamental issues of peace, war, and even Nazism, would deeply divide the Italian left.

The outbreak of the Spanish Civil War in the summer of 1936 put a definitive end to the proposed "reconciliation of the Italian people." Stalin's support of the Spanish Republic pitted Italian Communists against Mussolini's regime, which stood with General Francisco Franco. Spain became another symbol of hope for antifascists. Like the campaign in Ethiopia, however, the Spanish Civil War ended in a victory for the Fascists. Moreover, the Communists emerged from this struggle with their reputation further tarnished. Although Italian Communist volunteers fought well in the acclaimed Garibaldi Brigade, the Comintern acquired a richly merited reputation for deceit and treachery in Spain.

The Stalinist purge of the non-Communist left, so vividly depicted by George Orwell in *Homage to Catalonia* (1938), reached its peak during Togliatti's residence in Spain. As Stalin's trusted henchman during the purge trials that sent the Hungarian Communist party secretary, Béla Kun, and the leaders of the Polish Communist party to their doom, Togliatti established himself in Spain in July 1937.¹⁶ Under the code name "Alfredo," he served as the Comintern's adviser to the Spanish Communist party. Togliatti's role in the liquidation of Andrés Nin and other anti-Communist leftists remains in dispute, but even if precise documentation in these cases is lacking, Bocca doubts that he could have been uninvolved in events of such magnitude.¹⁷ The Soviet Union kept the Spanish Republic alive, and Togliatti served as Stalin's eyes and ears in Spain. On all important issues, he would have been the one to convey Stalin's decisive word. By 1938, with the mounting challenge posed by Hitler in Central Europe, Stalin drastically cut

back his support of Spain. This reduction signaled the beginning of the end for the Spanish Republic, and Togliatti fled to France in March 1939. The Spanish Republic fell the next month.

The signing of the Nazi-Soviet Pact, on 23 August 1939, ended the Popular Front coalition. Togliatti's support of this treaty completely destroyed his reputation on the non-Communist left. The Communist party became synonymous with perfidiousness. To democrats and socialists who viewed Nazism as the racist nemesis of democracy and socialism, the Nazi-Soviet Pact appeared as a monstrous perversion and a horrifying betrayal. Even for many within the party, the agreement had a disorienting effect. Some, like the historian Leo Valiani, gave up their membership because of it. The subsequent conquest and division of Poland by the Nazis and the Communists further damaged the image of the PCI. How to make the slaughter in Poland look like an advance of the historical dialectic toward communism presented a serious challenge to the party's propagandists. They adopted the line that far from being an invasion of Poland, Stalin's action in reality had resulted in the liberation of thirteen million Polish workers. At the same time, PCI spokesmen had to show that the Western democracies of England and France, not Hitler's Germany, posed the gravest threat to mankind. Once again, the social democrats became the enemy, although this time not as social fascists, because that term might have been offensive to the Soviet Union's new ally in Berlin, but as "imperialists."

The Nazi-Soviet Pact produced an odd interlude in Italian history. Until Hitler's invasion of the Soviet Union on 22 June 1941, the Italian Communist party and the Fascist regime found themselves on the same side in World War II. Italy entered the war on 10 June 1940, and Spriano notes that "regarding Soviet Russia [the Fascists] maintained an almost absolute silence and scrupulously avoided every polemical comment." The Soviets fully returned the favor. Vyacheslav Mikhailovich Molotov, Stalin's commissar of foreign affairs, explained that "a reciprocal comprehension" between Russia and Italy logically followed from the premise of the Nazi-Soviet Pact: the friend of Germany automatically became the friend of the Soviet Union.¹⁸ Molotov's reasoning came from Stalin, and thus Togliatti could be expected to fall in without reservation behind the Comintern line.

Nevertheless, Togliatti knew from long experience in the Comin-

tern how quickly Stalin could change his mind. He remembered that the dictator had presented the Popular Front strategy as the infallible sign of diabolical Trotskyism one day and as the sacred seal of the highest statesmanship the next. One had to be prepared in Stalinist Russia to move with the ever-changing directives from above. While accepting the Nazi-Soviet Pact, Togliatti understood its temporary character and prepared for the day when it would no longer exist. Even before Germany's invasion of the Soviet Union in Operation Barbarossa, he had attempted to reestablish contact with antifascist groups. Italy's disastrous defeats in Greece, Albania, and North Africa followed by the loss of Ethiopia destroyed Mussolini's mystique with the Italian people and undermined the Fascist regime. As disaffection for Mussolini and fascism grew in 1940 and 1941, Togliatti surreptitiously attempted to cultivate a place for the PCI in the antifascist front.

Togliatti, back in the Soviet Union in May of 1940 after spending several months in a French jail for passport problems, had been farsighted in getting ready for the end of the Nazi-Soviet Pact. The failure of Operation Barbarossa, the unmitigated disaster for German arms at Stalingrad, and Allied bombing raids on Italian cities in 1943 accelerated the decline of fascism. Fascist authorities watched helplessly as waves of strikes swept through northern factories. The Allied invasion of Sicily in July of that year produced the final crisis of the regime, and on 25 July Mussolini fell from power without anyone's lifting a finger in his defense. Spriano's telling of the coup d'état is memorable: "There must have been some twenty million Fascists, with one kind of membership card or another. On 26 July 1943 they all disappeared."¹⁹ Memorable but not accurate: in fact, many Fascists remained in the field. They would follow the soon-to-be-liberated Mussolini to the Republic of Salò in the North, where a murderous civil war would be fought for the next eighteen months.

The prestige gained by Stalin from the Soviet Union's victories over the formerly invincible German army lifted Togliatti and the PCI to an eminence in Italy that they never would have achieved on their own. Stalin, *il Baffone* (the great mustachioed one), became a folk hero as communism acquired an exalted status for a generation of Italians in search of a new ideal. In one of his Radio Moscow messages to the Italian people, Togliatti described Stalin as "the impregnable bastion of liberty [for] the entire world."²⁰ The Italian Communist party, which

began to attract many new members in 1943, proudly identified itself with the Soviet Union.

Great confusion has arisen over the non-Stalinist policies of the Stalinist PCI after 1944, when Togliatti returned to Italy and called upon Communists to put aside thoughts of class revolution. Instead he wanted them to work for the unity of all antifascist forces in single-minded pursuit of winning the war. The policies had more to do with the objective situation in which the party found itself than with Togliatti's real desires. It was a Stalinist party trying to make its way in a country that in 1944 did not admit of mature Stalinist practices. The party would have preferred to create a dictatorship of the proletariat in Italy, just as Stalin shortly would be doing in the People's Democracies of Eastern Europe, where the Red Army decided matters in favor of local Communists. Togliatti's consistently enthusiastic endorsement of the People's Democracies as paragons of state building can leave no doubt on this point.

The Italian Communist party, in contrast, had to cope with the problems raised by the presence in Italy of an Anglo-American military force. Stalin, and Togliatti with him, fully expected that the Western allies would control Italy in any event. The great postwar renaissance of Italian Communist culture evolved in response to the Stalinist ideas that Togliatti brought home with him and to a stubbornly capitalist social context. Capitalism would prove to be the stronger of the two and over time would compel the PCI to make a series of adaptations to democracy that in turn would generate yearnings for orthodox Marxist-Leninism in the hearts of the faithful.

The years immediately following Togliatti's return, however, were the happiest and most fulfilling of his life. Recognizing the vital contribution of Italian Communists in the war effort against Nazi-Fascism, General Pietro Badoglio included Togliatti in the new government, as minister without portfolio. The party continued to grow at a phenomenal rate, and by the end of 1945 it had more than 1,800,000 members.²¹ That year Togliatti became the minister of justice in the government of Ferruccio Parri, and then in 1946 he played a prominent role at the new Republic's Constituent Assembly, where, at the age of 53, he fell in love with the 26-year-old Nilde Iotti. A man with no close friends and only the weakest family ties, Togliatti entered this relationship with what appears to have been the abandon of desperation. To the

scandal of many in a Communist party that still officially lived by the puritanical statutes of the Livorno founding congress, he moved in with the beautiful young deputy from Reggio Emilia. They would stay together for the rest of his life.²²

Togliatti remained a key government figure until 1947, when the Cold War compelled the Christian Democratic prime minister, Alcide De Gasperi, to freeze out the Communists. Many in the PCI believed that the time had come for a proletarian insurrection, but not even a crushing defeat in the parliamentary elections of April 1948 or an attempt on his life three months later by a right-wing fanatic would induce Togliatti to forsake a policy of legalism toward the constitution that he had done so much to shape. The next year, when the Church threatened excommunication for any Catholic professing communism, Togliatti continued to restrain the anticlericals in his party. For the kind of long-term political strategy of accommodation that he had in mind, the Church at some point would be a necessary interlocutor. Togliatti thought Italy unripe for revolution, and, besides, Stalin did not want him to upset an international status quo that gave the Soviet Union a free hand in Eastern Europe.

The Gramsci Phenomenon

In this same period Togliatti successfully launched a premier cultural journal, *La Rinascita*. He made the goals of this monthly clear in the June 1944 program statement. Above all, he wanted “to furnish an ideological guide” to the Communist movement, which would then take the lead in renewing the national life of the country. Without a solid basis in “the classic sources of Marxism,” the party would fail to accomplish its historic mission of rescuing the Italian people from the piteous condition in which fascism had left them. Togliatti specified these sources: the doctrines of Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Stalin. Along the path charted by them, Italy would find redemption. At the same time, Togliatti wanted to open the pages of *La Rinascita* to “diverse forces not regularly included in our movement.” From the beginning the journal stood out for its ideologically eclectic appearance, the better to promote the cause of Marxism in Italy’s American-dominated postwar era.²³

In addition to the great quartet of German and Russian thinkers,

Togliatti energetically promoted Gramsci as the principal Italian contributor to the Marxist tradition. Antonio Labriola also came in for much praise as an original theorist, but Gramsci received star billing as Italy's greatest Marxist mind. Gramsci's theoretical legacy became the subject of numerous articles, and *La Rinascita* assiduously promoted his prison writings, which began to be published in 1947. In that year, the tenth anniversary of Gramsci's death, Togliatti hailed him as "our great one." Felice Platone, one of Togliatti's principal collaborators on the journal, wrote three months later that Gramsci's greatness lay in the brilliantly original combination of fidelity and originality with which he had served the Leninist tradition. Stalin had exhibited the same kind of originality; therefore, Platone could write: "They are Leninists not only in their political action, but also in their cultural activity." *La Rinascita* consistently presented Gramsci's interpretation of Marxist doctrine in the light of his Leninism. In no other way, Togliatti and the *Rinascita* circle argued, could Gramscianism be understood and appreciated.²⁴

The appearance of *Lettere dal carcere* in 1947 signaled the beginning of a Gramsci fashion that swept Italian intellectual life. Even critics as ill-disposed toward Marxism as Benedetto Croce thought that Gramsci's prison letters revealed an independence of spirit and a delicacy of feeling wholly uncharacteristic of Italian communism. Gramsci's deep and worried love for his family ennobled the letters and imparted to them an element of high pathos. He hauntingly described an existential loneliness that reflected the spirit of an age dominated by the literature of Camus and Sartre. To his sister-in-law, the faithful Tatiana Schucht, who supplied the main emotional support that Gramsci received in prison, he disclosed his plans and dreams for a great intellectual undertaking. He started out wanting to write about Italian intellectuals, comparative linguistics, the theater of Luigi Pirandello, and popular literature. He appears to have conceived the project as a form of discipline for himself. He explained to Tatiana: "In short, in accordance with a preestablished plan I would like to occupy myself intensely and systematically with some subject that will absorb me and centralize my interior life." To her he also confided his concerns about how he possibly could complete such a work without "great libraries" for documentation.²⁵

In the following year the momentous publication of Gramsci's

Quaderni del carcere got under way. Togliatti, who had received the notebooks in Moscow from Gramsci's sister-in-law, did not publish them in their entirety. The volumes that appeared under the general editorship of Felice Platone were arranged thematically, thereby disrupting the chronological continuity of Gramsci's text, and they omitted the many references that might disturb Stalin, whose approval Togliatti continued to seek. Also suppressed were all the comments that might give rise to or confirm suspicion about the very substantial differences between Gramsci and the PCI during the last years of his life as well as "the list of the books that he requested of his friends, lest among them were found those placed on the Index of Stalinism."²⁶ Not until the 1975 Valentino Gerratana edition would a reliable text of the prison writings be made available to the public.

Although a politically correct Stalinist Gramsci emerged from the first edition of the *Quaderni del carcere*, the intellectual force of his ideas came through, and for nearly thirty years these volumes formed the basis of his reputation around the world. The literary critic Carlo Salinari, writing in *La Rinascita*, echoed a broad consensus of opinion when he called Gramsci "the most genial and prepared Marxist that Italy has ever had," who gave intellectuals a method for thinking about the connections among history, culture, and politics. As a Marxist, Salinari especially valued Gramsci for the politically engaged way he thought about theory. Gramscianism to Salinari meant "*militant* criticism, a criticism in short that has the consciousness of being an integral part of the movement of renewal in our country." He claimed that Gramscianism was not tendentious or narrowly partisan, however, and the enormous international success of the *Prison Notebooks* confirms the majority status of his argument.²⁷ The international standing of this classic work would only grow with the passing years. It remains the supreme masterpiece of the Italian Marxist tradition.

In the seven volumes of the *Prison Notebooks*, which appeared during the late 1940s and early 1950s, Gramsci laid down guidelines for the proper study of mankind. A generation of Italian intellectuals, adrift after the debacle of fascism and still firm in their conviction that capitalism had caused the Depression and World War II, eagerly received his teaching. He offered them a technique for understanding the world and for changing it. His ideas about the role of culture in the decisive class battles of history thrilled them, for they now had a cause

of the highest importance in which intellectuals fought as protagonists. Ideas were the primary weapons in the clash of hegemonies and counterhegemonies.²⁸ The philosophy of the day was “none other than the mass of [theoretical] variations that the ruling class has succeeded in putting forward.” Ranged against the philosophical hegemony maintained by traditional liberal intellectuals like Benedetto Croce were the organic intellectuals who arose as “the specialized representatives and standard-bearers” of the counterhegemonic proletariat.²⁹

Gramsci's theories about intellectual history enriched Marxism, and Leszek Kolakowski calls him “the most original among the post-Lenin generation of Communists.” He opposed a mechanical interpretation of the superstructure's relationship with the economic mode of production: “The pretense . . . of presenting and displaying every fluctuation of politics and culture as an immediate expression of the substructure must be contested theoretically as primitive infantilism.” Culture evolved in subtle ways that precluded a simplistic understanding of it. As Marx had observed, ideas and values from long-terminated economic substructures continued to exist in the capitalist world, and the current hegemony could not be reduced to its economic arrangements. Culture also operated in society on many levels, all of which were deserving of the historian's notice. Nevertheless, Gramsci insisted that the middle and lower levels of culture did not possess the long-term importance of “the scientific works, of the grand philosophical syntheses that are the real turning points of history.”³⁰

In pursuit of their Cold War objectives, Italy's Communist leaders edited the *Quaderni* with their foremost ideological adversaries chiefly in mind: liberalism, Catholicism, and the United States. From the moment of its conception in the Risorgimento, the liberal state had betrayed the Italian people. Gramsci depicted the Risorgimento as a grand occasion for the monied elites and as a complete disaster for the country as a whole. By calling the Risorgimento “a passive revolution,” he meant that unlike their counterparts in the French Revolution of 1789 the Italian leaders had refused to turn to the people.³¹ Instead they had entrusted the country's unification to Piedmont and France. Camillo Cavour, the leader Gramsci most despised, had feared the people and at every opportunity sought to exclude them. Liberal intellectuals like Croce had provided a historical rationale for their exclusion.

Gramsci's indictments of the Catholic Church constitute one of the major themes in the *Quaderni*. An eternal impediment to the national-popular culture necessary for a democratic state, the Church had been the country's greatest misfortune. Gramsci thought that even the vaunted Catholic tradition of social justice amounted to no more than camouflage for privileges of power, in defense of which "the Church does not exclude any means, neither armed insurrection, nor individual attack, nor the appeal to foreign invasion."³²

In the pages of *La Rinascita* the United States loomed as communism's most implacable foe, and in "Americanism and Fordism" Gramsci gave the party some high-powered ammunition for the Cold War. With many other European intellectuals of the 1920s and 1930s, he saw the juggernaut of America moving along a path of unavoidable collision with Europe. Unlike most other commentators, however, Gramsci expressed no nostalgia whatsoever for the old Europe, which he reviled at every opportunity. America, with its ravening desire to rationalize all life in the interests of efficiency and profits, horrified him even more. Gramsci's comments about the inhuman tendency of American society to turn men into machines of production and consumption perfectly captured the editorial line of *La Rinascita*. Yet he also thought the United States possessed an "ingenuous and spontaneous" myth that gave it enormous and unrivaled power in the world. The country believed in itself. Its "energetic and progressive superstition" gave it a propulsive force that left the poor Europeans toiling far in the rear.³³ As a fierce critic of American capitalism, Gramsci did not want to make the mistake of underestimating and misrepresenting for crude propaganda purposes the real strength, originality, and wiliness of the class adversary across the ocean.

For inspiration about what to do in the face of the workers' class antagonists, Gramsci turned to Machiavelli, the subject of what eventually would be one of his most admired essays, "The Modern Prince." He viewed Machiavelli's *Prince* as one of the greatest "living" books of all time and as a classic example of Sorelian myth-making. In the figure of the prince Machiavelli had created "a concrete fantasy for a dispersed and pulverized people in order to revive them and organize their collective will." Machiavelli's creation had to be reincarnated, for once again the Italians had lost their way. A very important change would be in order, however: "The modern prince, the myth-prince, cannot be a real person, a concrete individual; it can only be

an organism, an element of complex society in which there already has begun to take concrete form a collective will recognized and partially affirmed in action.” Gramsci’s candidate for the role of the modern prince was the Communist party because it contained within itself “the first cell in which the beginnings of the collective will tend toward the universal and the total.” The party would educate and lead the masses.³⁴

Promoting Gramsci, Stalin, and the Soviet Union

Togliatti interpreted the *Quaderni del carcere* as a work that confirmed the link between Gramsci’s ideas about culture and Stalin’s political practice. As wrong as this judgment seems to Gramsci scholars today, few Italian Communists questioned it at the time. Apart from the disgruntled Trotskyites, Stalinism seemed to postwar Communists to have evolved as the most genuine form of Leninist praxis, in the Gramscian sense of that term. In the December 1949 issue of *La Rinascita* Togliatti ran a front-page photograph of Stalin looking at an image of Lenin and hailed the current Soviet dictator as the chief inspiration of Italian Communists: “But in vain would we hope to move forward and to report successes, if we had not had You, manager, animator, leader.” He continued: “You have taught us to be Communists . . . We endeavor to be faithful to your teaching.” He encouraged Communists to take pride in Stalin as the finest specimen that their culture could produce.³⁵

Togliatti claimed that the Soviet Union stood alone between capitalism and the destruction of the world. He based his interpretation of Soviet history entirely on the *Short Course*, a book that for decades would remain required reading in PCI training schools. The Committee of Soviet writers that produced this book worked under guidelines furnished by Stalin, who actively participated in the writing and editing of the final version. At least one of the sections, “Dialectical and Historical Materialism,” is of his direct authorship. During Stalin’s lifetime the *Short Course* was reprinted three hundred times, selling more than forty-two million copies in sixty-seven languages. The narrative unfolds as a morality tale in which Lenin’s hidden enemies at the time of the October Revolution are fearlessly unmasked and justly punished by Stalin in the mid-1930s. The collectivization of agriculture, the in-

dustrialization of society, and the purge trials are said to have signaled “a momentous turning point in the history of mankind . . . marking a new epoch in the history of the world.”³⁶

Togliatti’s interpretation of current Soviet society came straight from the pages of *Pravda*. Only in the Soviet Union did people enjoy full human rights, including the guaranteed opportunity to work and the legal requirement of just compensation. The United States, by comparison, fell woefully short, an irredeemably violent, racist, and exploitative society. The spectacular success of Stalin’s Five-Year Plans proved that “the superiority of socialism is by now beyond dispute.”³⁷ The new abundance of consumer goods in the Soviet Union would make it possible for the country to move beyond socialism to the final stage of history prophesied by Marx, communism.

The “new men” of the Stalin era were coming, and Togliatti hailed them as the liberators of humanity. They made a bracing contrast to the decadent spawn of terminal capitalism, with its culture of despair, disillusionment, and immorality. The existential crisis of the West, so evident in its literature and art, had its point of origin in a degenerate economic system, just as the cultural marvels of the Soviet Union could only be understood as consequences of Stalinist economic democracy. The new system created by Stalin had neither classes nor economic groups of any kind and, therefore, no need of different parties. The only necessary party in such a society was the one that worked for the proletariat. Togliatti considered Stalinism to be the highest form of polity yet reached by man. Whenever he used the term “democracy” in these postwar years, he meant Stalinism. Italy had to make its way through a period of history when capitalist elites at home and abroad exercised controlling power, and Stalinism could only be an ideal, not a practical program.

As a Communist journal of culture, *La Rinascita* sought to harmonize Gramsci and Stalin. To do so, Togliatti and the others had to come to terms with one of the most remarkable Communist figures of the period, Andrei Zhdanov. The commissar of culture under Stalin, Zhdanov died at the age of 52 in 1948. In an obituary article for *La Rinascita* the Communist historian Emilio Sereni paid tribute to him as “a combatant for the cultural revolution.” Armed with an “unshakeable, active, Stalinist faith in the masses of humanity,” Zhdanov had taken the lead in “the struggle against the residues of the old cul-

ture.” In the following year the Edizioni Rinascita publishing house brought out Zhdanov’s *Politica e ideologia*, an anthology of his reports and speeches that the editors touted as an essential contribution for “the renewal of Italian culture.” They praised his clear and forceful Marxist ideas about culture: “For Andrei Zhdanov, for the Soviet peoples, for the workers of the entire world, culture is not something separate from life and the struggle; it is something that has a bearing on life and the struggle, like the construction and defense of factories, of collective farms, of socialism.”³⁸

Zhdanov held that real culture could only be Marxist-Leninist, as defined by Comrade Stalin. This meant that intellectuals and artists had the obligation to create the cultural analogue of the Five-Year Plans. Stalin had called such individuals “the engineers of the soul,” and Zhdanov added that to perform their exalted task properly they would have to make a completely evident profession of ideological faith in every work they produced. Sadly, “the Central Committee of the party recently had discovered some unacceptable indications of apolitical ideological laxity in our literature and art.” He could only attribute such decadence to the survival of capitalist residues in Soviet society. Zhdanov proposed to solve this problem by completely Stalinizing culture, and by this he meant imposing “Bolshevik intransigence against ideological deviations of every kind.”³⁹

The Gramsci and Zhdanov halves of Marxist-Leninist cultural theory, as they existed in Togliatti’s mind, came together on this point: culture had a transformative function in capitalist society and one of preservation in communist society. Once society becomes communist, no Marxist-Leninist can justify the existence of non-communist cultures in it. Togliatti’s eclectic cultural strategy in *La Rinascita*, therefore, had to do not with his most deeply held convictions about culture but with the circumstances of Italy’s postwar situation, which he wanted to transform. He sought to use Gramscian methods to achieve a Zhdanovian result, although it must be said that the ultimate logic of Gramsci’s theory about hegemony also leads to the removal from society of all communism’s ideological rivals.

The extent to which Togliatti thought about culture in terms of a Gramsci-Zhdanov model became clear in his storied clash with Elio Vittorini (1908–1966). A critic and writer during the interwar period, Vittorini became deeply interested in American literature, particularly

the work of William Faulkner, William Saroyan, and Erskine Caldwell, whose books became his principal models. The Spanish Civil War provoked a political crisis in Vittorini, and he wrote his most famous book, *Conversazioni in Sicilia* (1941), in the heat of his disillusionment with fascism. After joining the Resistance and the Communist party during World War II, Vittorini edited the Milan edition of *L'Unità* and then the prestigious intellectual journal *Il Politecnico*. Two of his postwar novels, *Uomini e no* (1945) and *Le donne di Messina* (1949), made him an international figure.

From the beginning of Vittorini's association with Togliatti, tensions existed between the two men over the party's expectations about loyalty from its intellectuals and artists. A final rupture occurred between them in 1951 when Vittorini left the party in disgust with its congenital inability to treat ideas and intellectuals in anything but a political way. Togliatti then dismissed Vittorini as an overpraised mediocrity who had despaired upon discovering that with their political agenda the Communists were not pure intellectuals: "He came to us, it is said, because he believed that we were liberals: instead we are Communists." What did the name Communist mean, Togliatti queried. For intellectuals, it meant what Zhdanov said it did: "that art must be the mirror of social reality." Vittorini did not want to accept Zhdanov or the recently created Cominform (Communist Information Bureau), which disseminated information and advice on cultural policy to Communist parties. He thought such individuals and organizations reeked of the Inquisition. Togliatti countered that thought and practice had to be combined for the advancement of socialism. The world had to be changed, not merely understood. As a Marxist, Vittorini had never made it to the eleventh thesis in "Theses on Feuerbach."⁴⁰

Togliatti continued to defend Stalinism in all of its manifestations until the revelations of 1956 and then in its essentials after that. In the early 1950s *La Rinascita* advocated a straight Panglossian line about the Soviet Union and its Eastern European satellites: all was for the best in the best of all possible worlds. The journal reported steadily declining illiteracy and poverty rates in a Soviet empire that valiantly stood for peace, freedom, and democracy against the aggression, tyranny, and bourgeois dictatorship of the United States. Togliatti presented every action of the Soviet Union as a carefully reasoned response to a world moving steadily toward socialism.

La Rinascita regularly blamed Western propaganda for all reports about nationalist resentments and economic difficulties in the Peoples' Republics. In fact, according to the journal, Stalinist Five-Year Plans worked as well in Eastern Europe as they did in the Soviet Union, and the relationship between the parent socialist country and its offspring was one of mutual caring. The parts of Europe subject to Soviet solicitude could be thankful for their deliverance from the appalling fate to which the United States, through NATO and the Marshall Plan, had subjected Western Europe. Togliatti zealously promoted the anti-American argument of the Soviet intellectual Ilya Erenburg, a frequent contributor to *La Rinascita*. In *America* (1947) and in articles for *La Rinascita*, Erenburg indicted the United States as a land of obscene wealth and harrowing poverty, completely fictitious civic ideals and the all-too-real degradation of blacks, and a meretricious freedom that had produced the most standardized set of shallow opinions about politics and culture in all of recorded history. By contrast, he continued, the socialist wonderland of Eastern Europe enjoyed the manifold blessings of Stalinism.⁴¹

When Stalin died, in 1953, *La Rinascita* went into a long mourning. In the journal's major obituary article, "Glory to Stalin," the future party secretary Luigi Longo declared that his death had left all humanity shaken and bereft: "His titanic work, his genius, his life stupefied the world for more than thirty years." Togliatti, who in a commemorative speech before parliament on 6 March hailed the late Soviet dictator as "a giant of thought and action," continued to edit *La Rinascita* as if the Stalin regime would continue essentially unchanged. For the rest of 1953 the journal carried on with its standard glossy promotional campaign for Stalinism.⁴²

Beginning in 1954, however, the Stalinist shell that had encased *La Rinascita* began to crack. In February the journal acknowledged the existence in Czechoslovakia and Hungary of "errors derived from the mechanical importation of ideological and political propaganda." The parties in these countries had been guilty of "errors of dogmatism in the diffusion of Marxism-Leninism." Bureaucracy was impeding the diffusion of the party message, "rendering it inelastic and hardly adequate to the needs of the masses." The admission of so much incompetence and wrongdoing in the Soviet Union was startling. Togliatti, enjoying a privileged relationship with the Kremlin, thus signaled to

Italian Communists that the legacy of Stalin was undergoing a sharp downward revision in the Soviet Union. Even he, however, would be flabbergasted by the exposé of Stalin at the twentieth party congress, in 1956.⁴³

The Crisis of 1956

In retrospect, it is plain that the Soviet Union suffered a fatal public relations wound at the twentieth congress. The Soviet model never recovered from the revelations in Nikita Khrushchev's "secret report" to the party. Since the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, the publication of documents from the Communist archives has confirmed Khrushchev's charges, which were based on the research of numerous government commissions: Stalin had been a criminal lunatic and stood indicted as the worst mass murderer in history.⁴⁴ The paramount icon of Soviet Marxism lay trampled in the dust, not as a result of Cold War machinations by the CIA or John Foster Dulles's State Department but by the research of Soviet historians. From this time forward, the ideological history of Marxism would consist of a failed search for a replacement icon. Candidates would come and go—Mao in China, Castro in Cuba, the FLN in Algeria, Ho Chi Minh in Vietnam—but in the end neither these Marxist political leaders nor the Marxist and semi-Marxist syntheses of such intellectuals as Georg Lukács, Karl Korsch, Lucien Goldmann, Herbert Marcuse, Ernst Bloch, and diverse "New Left" pretenders to the throne could repair the damage of 1956.⁴⁵

With Stalin now in disgrace, Togliatti tried to effect a seamless transition for the PCI to the new Soviet order. He initially downplayed the significance of February 1956. The real story of the twentieth congress, according to him, concerned "its appeal to the workers of the entire world to unite for the liberation of humanity from the chains of capitalism and imperialism." He contended that the economic advances of the Soviet Union "stupefy the experts and strike the fancy of ordinary men." Only Soviet methods could lift up the masses of the world. Although Togliatti insisted that the twentieth congress had been a great victory for communism, he tellingly omitted all mention of Stalin. Moreover, in a way never before presented in *La Rinascita*, he called for a distinctively Italian path to socialism.⁴⁶ For more than ten years the journal had promoted the Soviet Union as the model social-

ist society. Readers would search its pages in vain for even the mildest criticism of Stalin's policies and methods. No one more than Togliatti had defended Stalin against the heresies of Tito, the first Communist leader of the postwar era to argue that the Soviet model required some fine-tuning. From Togliatti's relentless attacks in the late 1940s and early 1950s against Tito and other real and imaginary anti-Stalinist deviationists, it can be deduced that his appeals for an Italian path to socialism had more to do with the method of approach than with the content of the result. In the aftermath of 1956, obviously, adjustments would have to be made, but he saw the problem in terms of public relations, not philosophical soul-searching. He remained a perfect Stalinist to the end.

In an interview in the spring of 1956, Togliatti attempted to explain what the Soviet Union's condemnation of Stalin actually meant. He adopted the official Soviet line that the cult of personality had led to distortions of Marxism-Leninism that now were in the process of being corrected. In short, the Marxist-Leninist system worked. The exposure of Stalinism's defects by Soviet historians and leaders perfectly illustrated the self-correcting mechanism of the democracy that Lenin had established. As a result of the 1956 Moscow congress, some Communists had experienced "sadness . . . disorientation . . . and doubts," but no honest observer could infer from these scattered reactions that a "crisis" existed in communism. "The creation of the Soviet Union," Togliatti asserted, "is the greatest fact of contemporary history." He retained complete faith in Soviet communism. Indeed, the system would work even better now that its relatively minor flaws were being eliminated. Togliatti consistently downplayed all the revelations about Stalin, including the show trials, which he insisted had been completely legal.⁴⁷

In his interview Togliatti spoke about the relationship between the Soviet Union and a part of the world soon to be very much in the news, the Peoples' Democracies of Eastern Europe. He professed to believe in the completely democratic and mutually desirable nature of the Warsaw Pact alliance: "I hope that there is no one, in Italy at least, who believes the ridiculous legend about Communist parties receiving precise instructions, directives, [and] orders from Moscow." The peoples of Eastern Europe, in other words, supported the Soviet Union not out of fear or intimidation, but because they were con-

vinced of its essential rightness in the Cold War. When anti-Soviet violence flared up in Poland that summer, *La Rinascita* blamed it on “hooligans” and “numerous elements of the underworld and common criminals.” Worse violence was brewing in Hungary, and as the situation there deteriorated *La Rinascita* complained about the imperialists who wanted to weaken “the brotherly friendship and unity of the Soviet Union and the countries of popular democracy.”⁴⁸

Without reservation, Togliatti defended the ensuing Soviet invasion of Hungary. He conceded that the Communists had made mistakes in Hungary, but the situation there called for more communism, not less. The reformers posed a mortal danger to communism with their semicapitalistic schemes. “The new Hungary,” by which Togliatti meant the Stalinist puppet regime, was at stake; therefore, the armed uprising had to be met with force. Thousands of Hungarians died and tens of thousands went into exile, but Togliatti implored Communists not to become lost in the “tragicalness” (*la tragicità*) of these events. The Soviet system had to be corrected and defended at the same time. Despite his pleas, more academics, artists, and journalists abandoned the PCI. Popular support for the party remained high, but Elio Vittorini spoke for a cross-section of the formerly Communist intellectual elite when he lamented the final passing of all hope for “a democratic and liberal communism.”⁴⁹

In the aftermath of the twentieth party congress and the invasion of Hungary, Togliatti continued his damage-control operations. The great peril now lay in a headlong rush to “heedless and dangerous revisionism.” In a prophetic statement, he warned that Communists had to cling tenaciously to “the Marxist-Leninist foundations of our thought and practice.” Otherwise, they inescapably would become part of the capitalist status quo or drift into ideological irrelevancy. Despite the “errors,” “distortions,” and “irregularities” that had been discovered in the Soviet bureaucracy, the principle of socialism itself had not been besmirched and remained the finest ideal to which man could aspire. His high-flown words did little to halt the splintering of the party.⁵⁰

At the eighth congress of the PCI in December 1956, Togliatti claimed to be taking the middle road between revisionists, who advocated freedom in the party and full democratic liberties in society, and pro-Soviet hardliners. He ended by satisfying neither group. Although

his immense personal prestige shielded him against outright revolts in the party, revisionists complained about residual Stalinism while the hardliners worried about the revisionist implications of his “Italian path” to socialism. Togliatti defended himself against this last charge by arguing that his current strategy fell within the limits of standard Leninist practice. Lenin had adapted Marxism with great originality to the requirements of the Russian situation, and Togliatti claimed to be doing the same thing in Italy.

The Extraparliamentary Left

The crisis of 1956 also resulted in a revival of revolutionary Marxist-Leninism on a broad and eclectic front of dissent that came to be known as the extraparliamentary left. Raniero Panzieri, a radical Socialist, quickly became its most influential figure.⁵¹ Writing for Pietro Nenni’s influential Socialist journal, *Mondo Operaio*, in the aftermath of Khrushchev’s exposé and the invasion of Hungary, Panzieri urged Marxists to go back to their Leninist roots. He thought that Leninism undefiled by Stalinism would cure Marxism of its ills. Panzieri emphatically rejected the revisionists’ idea that Marxism could be compatible with social democracy. Faith in revolution as the only way to bring about socialism constituted the irreducible core of Panzieri’s Marxism. Yet, if social democracy fell completely outside the Marxist tradition for him, so did *togliattismo*, which he interpreted as a doctrine of immiscible elements. On the one hand, Togliatti claimed to be supporting the constitution of the Italian Republic. On the other, he continued to present himself as a Leninist revolutionary. He could not have this argument both ways. To resolve the ambiguities into which Togliatti had plunged Italian communism, Panzieri in 1961 founded the *Quaderni Rossi* (Red Notebooks), a radical journal for all those Socialists and Communists in Italy who continued to believe unambiguously in the revolution.

One of the crucial moments in Panzieri’s ideological formation had occurred during a ten-day trip that he made to China in the fall of 1955 with Nenni and some other Socialist leaders. He noted in his trip diary, “I cannot remove from my mind the thought that this country is or at least will soon become the keystone of the world.” In a subsequent diary entry he affirmed that China “is preparing in gladness a revolution for the world.” According to Luciano Della Mea, another

prominent figure involved in the *Quaderni Rossi*, Mao Zedong was “discovered” for the Italian left by Panzieri on this legendary trip. Anticipating what would become a dominant ideological convention on the extraparlimentary left in the 1960s and 1970s, the *Quaderni Rossi* publicized the Maoist alternative of peasant communism to Soviet communism.⁵²

Togliatti strove to contain the Italian left’s enthusiasm for Mao’s China. As the Sino-Soviet split widened, he sided energetically with the Russians. Togliatti, however, could not revive genuine enthusiasm in Italy for the Soviet Union, and the politics of the PCI became increasingly equivocal. Formal expressions of abiding faith in the October Revolution became coupled with what Bocca calls “an encounter with the Catholics and the gradual conquest of hegemony.” Togliatti claimed to be acting in the name of Lenin, but his post-1956 Leninism bore no resemblance to the creed of Livorno, as the French Communist intellectual Roger Garaudy pointed out in January 1957 in a famous critique of “the Italian path to socialism.”⁵³ Togliatti invoked Lenin now against the extremist revolutionary position of the Chinese Communists, who opposed peaceful coexistence with the capitalist West. Thus, under Togliatti the PCI began to move away from the Soviet orthodoxies of its past and toward an articulation of a distinctively European socialism. He was one of the fathers of the Eurocommunist experiment of the 1970s, and, despite his protestations to the contrary, the PCI’s new line led inexorably to the abandonment of the revolutionary project. Declaring the necessity of political flexibility in a country rapidly and tumultuously transforming itself from a traditional agricultural society into an industrial one, the realistic Togliatti had become the very thing he had always hated most: a reformist.

Togliatti’s moderation became more evident in the aftermath of the riot-filled strikes that swept Turin in July 1962. The extraparlimentary left interpreted the violence as proof that a revolutionary situation existed in Italy. Togliatti, by contrast, declared that “elements of provocation” had not been absent. The Communist party historian Paolo Spriano named these elements: the *Quaderni Rossi* radicals. Their infantile leftism called up memories of anarcho-sindicalism and “carried the signature of organized provocateurs at the service of the anti-worker and anti-Communist cause.” Spriano here gave clear expression to the reform-mindedness of Togliatti’s party in the early 1960s.⁵⁴

The Chinese themselves exposed the logical and political contradictions in mature *togliattismo*. Their polemic against Togliatti takes on added historical significance because it explains why the largely pro-Chinese extraparlimentary left came to view him the way it did, as a time-serving opportunist who had sold out to capitalism and could best be ignored. At the tenth congress of the PCI, held in December 1962, Togliatti rejected what he called the simplistically revolutionary interpretation of Marxism offered by the Chinese. They replied with “Le divergenze tra il compagno Togliatti e noi,” a long newspaper article that was later amplified and published as a pamphlet. The Chinese saw their conflict with Togliatti as one between authentic revolutionary Marxist-Leninism and bourgeois reformism: “The duty of Marxist-Leninists is to proceed as Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Stalin did,” and *togliattismo* had nothing to do with this tradition.⁵⁵ Togliatti now found himself on the receiving end of the revolutionary diatribes he once had unleashed against Turati.

The Chinese quoted Marx and Lenin repeatedly, but their analysis of the world situation echoed the national-liberation rhetoric of Frantz Fanon’s *Wretched of the Earth* (1961). In a conspicuous amendment to *The Communist Manifesto*, they wrote: “Workers and oppressed nations of the world unite!” The Chinese identified the West’s relentless exploitation of the world’s resources as the essential precondition for revolution. The triumph of the Chinese masses in 1949 furnished the updated prototype for a revolution featuring the combined class struggles of the workers and the peasants. By leading the struggle in China, Mao had entered the Marxist pantheon, joining Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Stalin. Togliatti, in contrast, with his “extremely confused notions,” had revealed himself to be nothing more than a pacifist populist. He and his increasingly schizophrenic party seemed to enjoy playing a game of ideological peekaboo at which they did not excel. They pathetically wanted the world to admire the original Italian contributions to Marxist-Leninism, as if by gaining a percentage point or two in the election results the PCI had given the capitalists a good beating. Their only originality lay in the unique combination of abject reformist apostasy with outward fidelity to the cause of revolution, which more and more had become detached from its moorings in the Marxist-Leninist project and had assumed the character of an insipid folk myth. The Chinese thought that the PCI, now full of sheep in wolves’

clothing, was content to pose as a revolutionary party while meekly surrendering “the strategic objectives of all Communists.”⁵⁶

In 1964 Togliatti visited the University of Pisa and gave a lecture destined to become part of the extraparlimentary left’s folklore. Old, tired, and slow of step, he encountered a group of young student radicals led by the 22-year-old Adriano Sofri. Echoing charges of the Chinese Communists, Sofri publicly accused Togliatti of not wanting the revolution. He characterized Togliatti’s politics as nothing but “tactical maneuvering, duplicity . . . force . . . and dogmatism.”⁵⁷ When Togliatti asked, “Why don’t you try to make the revolution,” Sofri replied, “I will, I will.”⁵⁸ A friend of Panzieri and his colleague on the *Quaderni Rossi*, Sofri went on to become one of the major figures in the extraparlimentary left of the 1960s and 1970s. As the editor of *Lotta Continua*, an incendiary newspaper that sought to mobilize the masses for revolution, he helped to define the historical character of those terrible years in Italian history.⁵⁹

Sofri and the Chinese Communists were not completely right about Togliatti. They thought that by the end of his life he had come to stand for unmitigated reformism. Belying their assessment is the invincible Leninism that Togliatti expressed in a political testament written during a trip to the Soviet Union in 1964, just a few days before his death from a cerebral hemorrhage on 21 August.⁶⁰ Togliatti’s image in this document of Lenin as the guarantor of cultural, artistic, and political freedom inside and outside the Communist party did not come from the pages of history. It came from Togliatti’s enduring faith in a cause that he believed could be saved and reanimated. He continued to think to his dying day that Leninism could be fixed, something that Kautsky and Turati knew to be impossible. Togliatti’s real legacy was to leave his party with its Leninist faith intact. Only some years into the future would reformism become the acknowledged goal of the Communist party, which by then stood on the verge of extinction.

Coda: Revolution and Terrorism in Contemporary Italy

A faith is not acquired; it grows like a tree. Its crown points to the sky; its roots grow downward into the past and are nourished by the dark sap of ancestral humus.

—Arthur Koestler, *Darkness at Noon*

One of the most controversial questions in Italy today concerns the origins of the terrorism that ravaged the country from 1969 to 1984. No other industrialized country in the contemporary world experienced a comparable degree of terrorist violence. More than twelve hundred people died or suffered grievous injury from thousands of attacks.¹ Dozens of groups on the left and the right were involved. Their victims included policemen, politicians, lawyers, judges, university professors, union leaders, industrialists, and unclassifiable bystanders. The left aspired to bring communist revolution to Italy. The goal of overturning the capitalist status quo, perceived by the left to be controlled locally by the Christian Democrats and globally by American imperialism, united terrorists from diverse ideological formations that shared a basic belief in Marxist revolution. Considerable uncertainty exists about the true goal of the radical right, but the antipathy of neofascists toward democratic Italian society could hardly have been less implacable than that of the communist left.

The Red Brigades were the most famous and destructive of the left-wing terrorist groups. In a book-length interview with two Communist journalists, *Brigate rosse: Una storia italiana*, Mario Moretti illuminates the origins of the Red Brigades in Italy's Marxist revolutionary tradition. This former Red Brigade chief and organizer of the 1978 kidnapping of Italy's paramount politician, Aldo Moro, explained that the Red Brigades emphatically belonged to the tradition of "communist revolutions" in Italy. The organization had not been interested in

“theoretical rigidities” any more than Lenin had been, but, like the Bolshevik leader, the Red Brigades had aspired to formulate a practical plan for creating a dictatorship of the proletariat. They were authentic Marxist-Leninists whose violent campaign against the Christian Democratic establishment had enjoyed widespread and long-term support in the extraparliamentary “movement” to the left of the official Communist party. This amorphous movement of students, workers, professionals, and dropouts spread through Italian society in schools, factories, and city neighborhoods. It contained a bewildering assortment of ideological elements and radical temperaments, but what united them was a belief in the necessity of communist revolution.²

The official Communist party, which reached its historic peak of voter support at 34 percent in 1976, had perpetuated the ambiguous reformism of Togliatti in its drive to become a credible democratic force. Moretti noted that the Red Brigades and like-minded revolutionaries moved into the vacuum created by the PCI. The Italian left of the 1960s thus reenacted its time-honored morality play between the forces of reform and revolution. The Cafiero-Costa feud had been act one. Then Turati’s opposition to the Labriolas, Mussolini, Bordiga, and Gramsci continued the drama, which the clash between Togliatti and Vittorini had carried to contemporary times, preceding Moretti and Enrico Berlinguer—the interlocutor of Aldo Moro in forging the historic compromise between the Communists and the Christian Democrats. Marx and Engels had influenced them all in the context of an ideological tradition distinctive for intramural antagonisms and vendettas. All these Italians turned to socialism for answers to the most serious questions of life, but they did so as *fratelli-nemici*, brother-enemies. Civil wars are reputedly the most savage of all human conflicts, and this principle applies to wars over ideology as well.

The Red Brigades appealed to a core element in the Italian political tradition: the faith of the extreme left in revolution. This faith, going back to the first communist stirrings of the French Revolution that Marx himself identified in the Conspiracy of Equals of Gracchus Babeuf and systematized into a doctrine, has never wanted for votaries in modern Italy. In the 1960s, with the economy stalling, labor strife mounting, and the educational system in collapse, the cause of Marxist revolution found new adherents. Moretti asserted that without the political, material, and psychological support of a broad cross-section

of extraparlimentary opinion, left-wing terrorism would have faded quickly. The astonishing destructiveness and staying power of the Red Brigades depended ultimately on their success in gaining the support of large numbers of people who believed in revolution as the First Cause of the good society.

Moretti's testimony echoes that of numerous other former terrorists. In his prototypical terrorist autobiography, *Io l'infame* (I the Infamous One), Patrizio Peci underscored the historical connections between 1960s radicalism and Red Brigade actions. The head of the Red Brigade column in Turin, Peci began his career as a terrorist with a vision of politics thoroughly conditioned by the Marxist-Leninist vulgate that informed the extraparlimentary left. He specifically cited Lenin's saying "Strike one to educate a hundred" as the golden rule of Red Brigadism. Peci disclosed that he had acquired these beliefs by reading *Lotta Continua*, the major newspaper of the extraparlimentary left. Edited by Adriano Sofri, *Lotta Continua* interpreted the horrendously destructive and still unsolved terror bombing of December 1969 at Piazza Fontana in Milan as the beginning of a neofascist plot against the state. According to Peci, Red Brigadism arose as the militant, revolutionary response of a small group of activists and their motley supporters on the extraparlimentary left to the perception of such a takeover. All were versed in Marx, Lenin, Stalin, Mao, and such Italian purveyors of the revolutionary mystique as Toni Negri, the most glamorous Italian academic guru of the 1960s. In numerous books and in articles for *Potere Operaio*, another major publication of the extraparlimentary left, Negri described how Marxist-Leninist principles of revolution would end Italy's long subservience to capitalist masters at home and abroad. Peci interpreted Red Brigadism as the immediate application of those revolutionary communist principles trumpeted during the 1960s: "It is obvious that one does not make such a choice if one does not believe completely in communism, if one does not believe in the armed struggle as the only way to bring it about, if one does not believe in victory."³

Enrico Fenzi, a Red Brigadist who had taught literature at the University of Genoa, explained in *Armi e bagagli* (Arms and Baggage) that armed terrorism could be understood only in the context of the revolutionary movement of the 1960s. Red Brigadism was one of the movement's many products. Critical of the left, Fenzi charged that the idea

of revolution, so dear to the 1960s, had engendered a political logic that led the most logical leftists into the inferno of Red Brigade terrorism. Jean-Paul Sartre's existential call to arms in *Critique of Dialectical Reason* (1960) reverberated across the ideological landscape of the Italian left, presenting in contemporary language the classic message of Marxist revolution. To Fenzi, the Communist party's desertion of the revolutionary cause in the 1960s was the real beginning of the broad movement that ultimately produced the Red Brigades. He likened the members of the Red Brigades to true believers bent on mounting a desperate last stand in defense of the old-time Marxist-Leninist religion against "the corrupted" on the left. Red Brigadism, thus, is best understood as a fundamentalist reaction within the church of Italian communism to the perceived perversion of the revolutionary word.⁴

One of the founders of the Red Brigades, Alberto Franceschini, made the same point in his memoir, *Mara, Renato e io*. In describing his role in the history of the organization, Franceschini emphasized the importance of his own ideological itinerary, beginning with the communist indoctrination he had received as a young boy. The fabled exploits of Gramsci, Togliatti, Lenin, and Stalin took the place of fairy tales in the Franceschini home. His grandfather, one of the first in Reggio Emilia to join the PCI, had fought as a partisan in World War II and never forgave Khrushchev for de-Stalinizing Communism. Alberto took his political bearings from this adored grandfather. As a young man in the 1960s, he moved from the increasingly mainstream Communist party to the outer fringes of the extraparlimentary left. Franceschini believed he was keeping faith with communism's true Bolshevik traditions by modernizing them to meet the needs of contemporary Italy's revolutionary situation. In helping to found the Red Brigades, Franceschini hoped to participate in a new Resistance, one that would finish the work of regenerating Italy left undone by the partisans of 1943–1945. All the Red Brigadists, he wrote, were "drug addicts of a particular type, of ideology. A murderous drug, worse than heroin."⁵

These three memoirs and the book-length interview of Moretti reveal the complex culture of violence that lay behind left-wing Italian terrorism during the 1970s and 1980s. Only Italy's large and highly variegated culture of revolution could make a phenomenon like the

Red Brigades possible. The extraparliamentary left movement was not always or even mainly terroristic. Not all the movement's leaders can be held personally responsible for acts of Red Brigade terrorism. Tactical differences of the sharpest kind separated Panzieri, Negri, and the Red Brigadists. The very real distinctions among these personalities must be duly noted.

Yet such an obligation need not induce the kind of historical amnesia that the early leader of the Red Brigades, Renato Curcio, warned against. In 1987 he pointed out that many thousands of people had participated in the movement of revolutionary protest to which the Red Brigades belonged. Many found it expedient to forget that they had shared beliefs with the Red Brigades when, in the early and mid-1970s, the dialectic in which they all believed appeared to be nearing its fateful communist climax. The forgetful ones wanted to give the Red Brigades "another history, a 'separate' history," but Curcio correctly insisted that the organization had been "entirely within 'the critical practice' of that state of things [*quello stato di cose*]" which vast and varied class strata had developed in a thousand forms." In other words, they all had believed in the communist revolution. The Red Brigades then had acted on that shared belief.⁶

If the Red Brigades had been a solitary or uncharacteristic force in Italian life, they could have been neutralized quickly, in much the same way that the Weather Underground was in the United States. However, as the journalist and historian Walter Tobagi argued in his survey of left-wing movements in Italy, revolutionary Marxist culture—of which Red Brigadism would become the most violent expression—existed as a major current in Italian political and intellectual life. The ideas of fanatical Marxist intellectuals had led to the violent deeds of impressionable youths, he concluded. Only 33 at the time of his murder in 1980 by XXVIII March Brigade terrorists who had been inspired by the Red Brigades, Tobagi understood that Curcio and Franceschini merely had taken the revolutionary left's stock-in-trade ideas and acted upon them.⁷

In justifying their deed, Tobagi's murderers cited a Gramsci quotation that they had found in a Red Brigade resolution of February 1978: "The worker must always know that the bourgeois newspaper (whatever its [ideological] tint) is an instrument of struggle charged by ideas and interests that are in contrast to his . . . the press is con-

stantly influenced by an idea: to serve the dominant class, that translates itself into a fact: to fight the working class.” The Red Brigadists interpreted these words to mean that under capitalism establishment journalists served the class enemy. Tobagi’s killers concurred: journalists like him made their living at the expense of “the proletariat and of their armed vanguard.” In eliminating him, they were following “the communist ideology,” which called upon revolutionaries to attack capitalism and all its minions. Indeed, Tobagi embodied the class enemy, whom “the instruments of Marxist analysis had permitted us today to specify and to annihilate.”⁸

What Tobagi’s scholarship suggested about the ideological prehistory of Red Brigadism and its many imitators on the left, the memoirs of Peci, Fenzi, and Franceschini illustrated, as did the courtroom records of Italy’s terrorism trials of the 1980s and 1990s. From the most notorious Red Brigade killers to mere underlings, the terrorists gave detailed sketches of their backgrounds in the extraparlimentary left groups that had arisen in the 1960s. They all had a political education in the classics of Marxist-Leninism. The students who had become terrorists described how their lives had revolved around the campus activities of the *Lotta Continua* and *Potere Operaio* organizations: the university collectives, the revolutionary discussion groups, and the demonstration marches. In this charged atmosphere, the Red Brigades appeared to be the next logical step on the path to revolution, which Sartre and other sages of the left had described as the only good in this sordid capitalist life. For the generation of radicals that had come of age in Lenin collectives, revolutionary nuclei, resistance committees, and study groups of the 1960s, the pamphlets and resolutions appearing under the five-pointed star of Red Brigadism seemed to be reason itself, or so many witnesses testified in the Moro trials.⁹

From the beginning, the Red Brigades’s tactics included physical attacks on the bosses and the institutions of capitalism, as a highly conscious form of applied Marxist-Leninism. In pamphlets and other communications the Red Brigades left no doubt about their goal of overturning the capitalist establishment through revolutionary violence. Of all these documents, the most illuminating was the “*Risoluzione della Direzione Strategica*” of 1978, in which they made a detailed profession of their ideological faith and explained, in effect, that Red Brigadism had the same relation to the Communist party that

Lenin did to Turati. In a latter-day echo of the eternal revolutionary lament in Italy, they declared: "Reformism is not a policy of the working class, but a policy of the imperialist state against the metropolitan proletariat."¹⁰ To them, the PCI simply had degenerated into a social democratic party, with Marx and Lenin no longer in evidence. Curcio, Franceschini, Moretti, and the others believed that history, as foretold by Marx and fulfilled by Lenin, was on the side of the communist revolution. By the mid-1980s, however, the Red Brigades had suffered a complete military defeat, and their aspirations for a Marxist-Leninist revolution had lost all plausibility. Only a handful of fanatical die-hards remained at large, and they lacked what the Red Brigades in their heyday had enjoyed: the support and sympathy of a politically meaningful segment of the population.

As with all debacles, the sudden disappearance of a historic cause gave rise to the question of what had inspired such a widespread and devout following in the first place. The idea of Marxist revolution had exerted a compelling power for generations of Italy's radicals. Arturo Labriola's plaintive question in his memoir—How could anyone growing up in late nineteenth-century Naples defend the status quo?—helps us to see the connection between the social disaster of Italy, particularly in the South, and the country's intellectual politics. There was much work for Marxists and antiliberals of all stripes to do in such an environment. On the left, the systematic rigor of Marx's critique of modern capitalism and the dazzling appeal of his universalist utopian alternative to the country's miseries assured the dominance of Marxism. To Cafiero, the Labriolas, and Mussolini, the Marxist word offered salvation from a way of life that condemned millions to a living hell. They may have exaggerated the failures of Liberal Italy, but the emigration statistics of the period confirm that something was terribly wrong with the nation. These four radical intellectuals played a foundational role in articulating the resentments of the multitudes who felt disinherited in Liberal Italy. They contributed to the shaping of a Marxist revolutionary tradition that others later would develop further.

With the Bolshevik triumph in 1917, the Leninist version of Marxism became dominant on the revolutionary left. The Italian Communist party, which Bordiga, Gramsci, and Togliatti created, distinguished itself from the Socialists and other leftist parties by its rigid

adherence to the Marxist-Leninist program for revolution. At this point in history, however, the tradition's ideals could be matched against the record of the Marxists who ruled in the Soviet Union, Lenin and Stalin. As François Furet pointed out in his memoir-indictment of the Communist left, *The Passing of an Illusion: The Idea of Communism in the Twentieth Century*, long before the definitive authentication of Stalin's credentials as the greatest mass murderer in history, "those who wanted to know could have known. The problem was that few wanted to." Beginning in 1918 with the books of Karl Kautsky and thereafter in a constantly swelling stream of first-hand or otherwise authoritative reports from Bertrand Russell, Boris Souvarine, Victor Serge, George Orwell, Arthur Koestler, André Gide, Angelo Tasca, and Ignazio Silone, the horrors in Russia could no longer be called a secret. The opening of the Soviet archives since the end of the Cold War has resulted in the complete vindication of these anticommunist critics.¹¹

Although Lenin's reputation has been greatly devalued and that of Stalin virtually destroyed, the real problem with their system stemmed from Marx's idea that no center of arbitration between the dictatorship of the proletariat and any other segment of society could be allowed to exist. This meant that due process had no place in a Marxist society, except to confirm automatically all the decisions made by the people's government. If the government is literally of the people conceived solely as a class, who can oppose a self-styled proletarian government without becoming a criminal? Such a polity could have but one outcome: the Gulag Archipelago. For all of Marx's brilliance as a critic of capitalism—Albert Camus in *The Rebel* called him "the incomparable eye-opener"—his political theories made a dire situation worse. Referring to the destination of Marxist thought in Soviet Russia, Camus conceded that "Marx never dreamed of such a terrifying apotheosis," but aspects of his thought could and did lead to the appalling disasters that Lenin and Stalin inflicted upon the world in the name of universal philanthropy.¹²

The Marxist revolutionary tradition in Italy is rich in particular examples of how this world-historical ideology arose from a legitimate sense of moral outrage but then failed to discover the political institutions and ethical values that would reduce the inequalities created by capitalism. Some failures are of a magnitude to finish off even the

most deeply rooted ideologies. By demonstrating with a mound of corpses and a host of shattered lives where the Marxist-Leninist revolution led, the Red Brigades paradoxically helped to kill communism as a serious alternative to capitalism. The Italian Communist party itself soon changed its name to the Democratic Party of the Left, forsaking Marxist-Leninist economic and political models and embarking on what so far has been a fruitless campaign to define itself as an alternative to the status quo. Indeed, with the political triumph in 1998 of the former Communist party hierarch, Massimo D'Alema, as prime minister, it became the status quo. Red Brigade theorists showed such skill at quoting Marx and Lenin in their policy statements that, in conjunction with the wreckage of the communist world following the collapse of the Soviet Union, these models became an embarrassment. Turati's prediction in 1921, that one day the tragedy of Bolshevism and its ruinous legacy in Italy would be exposed, had come true at last.

Exposure has not eradicated the faith completely. Despite the severity of its defeat, Marxist-Leninism in its unambiguous Red Brigade form proposes to launch a new crusade. After more than a ten-year hiatus, the Red Brigades returned to action by murdering two economists, Massimo D'Antona on 20 May 1999 and Marco Biagi on 19 March 2002. Though led by a new generation, the Red Brigadists of today identify with the revolutionary aims and ideology of their predecessors in the 1970s. They used the Internet to explain their killing of D'Antona and Biagi, who worked for the government on labor issues. D'Antona for the "leftist" prime minister Massimo D'Alema and Biagi for the "rightist" prime minister Silvio Berlusconi had proposed reforms that would subjugate Italy's workers to the conditions of the newly globalized market. Claiming to act in the name of "the Marxist conception of the historically necessary Communist Revolution" and "the Leninist conception of the imperialism of the State," the Red Brigade writers insisted that such experts had to die for the well-being of the workers, whose already precarious lives would otherwise be made even worse.¹³

That D'Antona and Biagi belonged to the moderate left intensified the antagonism of the Red Brigades toward them. They, along with the egregious D'Alema—whose progressivism, as the Red Brigadists saw it, was a creation entirely of public relations—epitomized the reform socialist variation of capitalism. Surveying the entire history of

the modern Italian left, the Red Brigade authors could see nothing fundamentally new in this most recent betrayal of the proletariat by false reformist leaders and their experts: “The reformism and revisionism that have accompanied the class movement for more than a century have only contributed to the consolidation and perpetuation of the imperialist bourgeoisie’s domination.”

The Red Brigades claimed that they alone stood outside the capitalist system and in revolutionary opposition to it. More than ever, the class struggle of the workers of the world authorized communists to lead exactly the kind of revolution that Marx had envisaged as the prelude to the real freedom of man. The world economic crisis brought on by globalization had created a promising political context for revolutionaries. It did not matter that few people supported the Red Brigades in 2002. How many supporters had Lenin had in 1902? The important thing was to keep the flame of revolution burning in the icy darkness of capitalism’s hegemony. The Red Brigades did not claim to be the equivalent of the Bolshevik party, which would be created in Italy at some future time. They only wanted to move the historical process in its inevitable direction. Capitalism would not escape its contradictions. The crisis fatal to acquisitive man would come. The undefiled faith of the revolutionary forefathers would be vindicated. Once more “the principle” of Carlo Cafiero had been affirmed.

Notes

1. Karl Marx: The Word

1. Karl Marx, *Selected Writings*, ed. David McLellan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 341. For the most authoritative analysis of Marx's ideas, see Leszek Kolakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism: Its Origins, Growth and Dissolution*, 3 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978). Vol. 1, *The Founders*, traces Marx's ideas to their sources in ancient philosophy and their immediate history in the breakup of the Hegelian inheritance.
2. Mikhail Bakunin, "Statism and Anarchy," in *Bakunin on Anarchy*, ed. Sam Dolgoff (New York: Knopf, 1972), 330, 331, 295.
3. "It would be difficult to find anyone who had a more Jewish ancestry than Marx," says David McLellan in *Karl Marx: His Life and Thought* (New York: Harper and Row, 1973), 2.
4. Marx, "On the Jewish Question," in *Early Texts*, ed. David McLellan (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1971), 110. Marx, "Letter to Arnold Ruge," *ibid.*, 60.
5. McLellan, *Karl Marx*, 97. Edmund Wilson analyzes the connections in Marx's thinking between "the aims of the utopians [and] Hegel's process of organic development" in *To the Finland Station: A Study in the Writing and Acting of History* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1940), 143.
6. Marx, "Towards a Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right," in *Early Texts*, 115, 127.
7. William Wordsworth, "The Female Vagrant," in Wordsworth and Samuel Coleridge, *Lyrical Ballads 1798* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), 44; "Lines Written a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey," *ibid.*, 112.

8. Marx, "Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts," in *Early Texts*, 133.
9. Ibid., 137, 138.
10. Ibid., 146, 148.
11. Friedrich Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 316.
12. Ibid., 12, 40.
13. Ibid., 63, 300.
14. Kolakowski writes: "From 1843 onwards he [Marx] developed his ideas with extreme consistency, and all of his later work may be regarded as a continuation and an elaboration of the body of thought which was already constituted by the time of *The German Ideology*." *Main Currents of Marxism*, vol. 1, 177. McLellan, *Karl Marx*, 151.
15. Marx (with Friedrich Engels), *The German Ideology* (Amherst, N.Y.: Prometheus, 1998), 29, 128–478.
16. Ibid., 41, 42.
17. Ibid., 59, 82.
18. Ibid., 60, 86, 60, 97.
19. Marx, "Theses on Feuerbach," *ibid.*, 574.
20. Engels, Preface, in Marx and Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (New York: International Publishers, 1948), 4, 6, 8.
21. Marx, *ibid.*, 11.
22. Ibid., 12–13.
23. Ibid., 14.
24. Ibid., 19. *The Communist Manifesto* provides a flattening rejoinder to Marx's biographer Francis Wheen, who insists on the absence in the Marxist canon of any claim regarding the dependence of the proletariat on elite intellectuals: "Where have these views and remarks been documented? You will search the works of Marx . . . in vain." Francis Wheen, *Karl Marx: A Life* (New York: Norton, 1999), 276.
25. Marx, *Communist Manifesto*, 19, 22.
26. Ibid. 30.
27. Ibid., 25, 28, 25.
28. Ibid., 32, 37, 41.
29. Ibid., 44, 20, 44.
30. Marx, "Articles for the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung*," in *Selected Writings*, 271.
31. Marx and Engels, "Address of the Central Authority to the League," in *Collected Works*, vol. 10: *Marx and Engels 1849–1851* (New York: International Publishers, 1978), 279, 280.
32. McLellan, *Karl Marx*, 268–269.
33. Ibid., 287.
34. Marx, *The Grundrisse*, ed. and trans. David McLellan (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), 2.

35. Marx, "Introduction," to *Economic Manuscripts of 1857–1858 (First Version of Capital)*, in *Collected Works*, vol. 28 (New York: International Publishers, 1986), 26, 38.
36. Marx, [Chapter on Capital], sec. 2, "Circulation Process of Capital: Conclusion," in *Collected Works*, vol. 29 (New York: International Publishers, 1987), 40.
37. [Chapter on Money], "The Origin and Essence of Money," *ibid.*, vol. 28, 93.
38. *Ibid.*, vol. 29, 83, 87, 90. "[Addenda to the Chapters on Money and Capital]," *ibid.*, 209.
39. [Chapter on Money], "The Origin and Essence of Money," *ibid.*, vol. 28, 108, 109, 97.
40. *Ibid.*, 91; [III Chapter on Capital], "Reproduction and Accumulation of Capital," *ibid.*, 336. [III Chapter on Capital], "Fixed Capital and Development of the Productive Forces of Society," *ibid.*, vol. 29, 94.
41. [Chapter on Capital], "Reproduction and Accumulation of Capital," *ibid.*, vol. 28, 337, 388.
42. Wheen, *Karl Marx*, 180.
43. Marx, "Preface" to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy: Part One*, in *Collected Works*, vol. 29, 261. Editors' Preface, *ibid.*, xvi.
44. Marx, "Preface," *ibid.*, 263.
45. *Ibid.*, 265.
46. In 1864 Marx received a double inheritance, but soon the begging letters to Engels resumed. McLellan, *Karl Marx*, 353.
47. Marx to Lassalle, 16 Jan. 1861, in Marx and Engels, *Selected Correspondence, 1846–1895* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1975), 125.
48. Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1, *A Critical Analysis of Capitalist Production*, ed. Engels (New York: International Publishers, 1967), 648, 760.
49. *Ibid.*, 715.
50. *Ibid.*, 716, 727.
51. *Ibid.*, 278, 331.
52. *Ibid.*, 609, 440, 334.
53. *Ibid.*, 302.
54. *Ibid.*, 661, 696, 423.
55. *Ibid.*, 752.
56. *Ibid.*, 763.
57. *Ibid.*, 423.
58. McLellan, *Karl Marx*, 386.
59. Wheen, *Karl Marx: A Life*, 288.
60. Karl Marx and V. I. Lenin, *The Civil War in France: The Paris Commune* (New York: International Publishers, 1976), pt. 1, 81. Engels, "Introduction," *ibid.*, 22.

61. Marx, *ibid.*, 79. Marx to Kugelmann, *ibid.*, 86.
62. Wilson, *To the Finland Station*, 343.

2. Carlo Cafiero: Prophet of Anarchist Communism

1. Pier Carlo Masini, *Cafiero* (Milan: Rizzoli, 1974), 12: written from a strongly pro-anarchist viewpoint, this is the most authoritative biography of Cafiero. Max Nettlau, *Bakunin e l'Internazionale in Italia: Dal 1864 al 1872* (Geneva: Edizione del Risveglio, 1928), 217.
2. Albert Boime, *The Art of the Macchia and the Risorgimento: Representing Culture and Nationalism in Nineteenth-Century Italy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), introduction. The Macchiaioli were the approximate Italian counterparts of the French Impressionists.
3. Cafiero to Engels, 28 June 1871, in Giuseppe Del Bo, ed., *La corrispondenza di Marx e Engels con italiani* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1964), 18.
4. Cafiero to Engels, 12 June 1871, *ibid.*, 14.
5. Engels to Cafiero, 1 July 1871, *ibid.*, 20.
6. Cafiero to Engels, 12 July 1871, *ibid.*, 24.
7. Engels to Cafiero, 16 July 1871, *ibid.*, 30; 28 July 1871, *ibid.*, 34.
8. Cafiero to Engels, 10 Sept. 1871, *ibid.*, 42; 18 Oct. 1871, *ibid.*, 53.
9. Cafiero to Engels, 29 Nov. 1871, *ibid.*, 94, 96.
10. E. H. Carr, *Michael Bakunin* (New York: Vintage, 1937), 4, 329.
11. Nettlau, *Bakunin e l'Internazionale in Italia*, 167, 248, 211, 212.
12. Cafiero to Engels, 12 June 1872, in Del Bo, ed., *La corrispondenza*, 221, 220.
13. Engels to Cafiero, 14 June 1872, *ibid.*, 227, 228.
14. T. R. Ravindranathan, *Bakunin and the Italians* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1988), 196.
15. Masini, *Cafiero*, 125. Max Nettlau, *Errico Malatesta: Vita e pensieri* (New York: Casa Editrice "Il Martello," 1927), 109. Nunzio Pernicone, *Italian Anarchism, 1864–1892* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 90–95.
16. Masini, *Cafiero*, ch. 9.
17. Cafiero, "I tempi non sono maturi," *La Plebe*, 26–27 Nov. 1875, in Cafiero, *Rivoluzione per la rivoluzione*, ed. Gianni Bosio (Rome: La Nuova Sinistra, 1970), 41.
18. Antonio Lucarelli, *Carlo Cafiero: Saggio di una storia documentata del socialismo* (Trani: Vecchi, 1947), 103–110.
19. Roberto Michels, *Storia critica del movimento socialista italiano: Dagli inizi fino al 1911* (Florence: La Voce, 1926), 50. See also his *Storia del marxismo in Italia: Compendio critico con annessa bibliografia* (Rome:

Libreria Editrice Luigi Mongini, 1910); the bibliography in this book is invaluable.

20. Masini, *Cafiero*, 182.
21. *Ibid.*, 201.
22. *Ibid.*, 203.
23. Pernicone, *Italian Anarchism*, 126.
24. Bakunin, *Selected Writings*, ed. Arthur Lehning (London: Jonathan Cape, 1973), 178–182, quoted by Pernicone in *Italian Anarchism*, 62.
25. Pasquale Turiello, *Governo e governati in Italia*, ed. Piero Bevilacqua (Turin: Einaudi, 1980), 209.
26. Cafiero, *Compendio del “Capitale”* (Rome: La Nuova Sinistra, 1969), 7, 8.
27. *Ibid.*, 43, 54.
28. *Ibid.*, 72, 83.
29. *Ibid.*, 97, 101.
30. Cafiero to Marx, 23 July 1879, in Del Bo, ed., *La corrispondenza*, 285.
31. Marx to Cafiero, 29 July 1879, *ibid.*, 286.
32. Cafiero, “Anarchia e comunismo,” *Le Révolté* (Geneva), 13 Nov. 1880, in *Rivoluzione per la rivoluzione*, 48.
33. *Ibid.*, 51.
34. Cafiero, “Anarchia e comunismo,” pt. 2, *Le Révolté*, 27 Nov. 1880, in *Rivoluzione per la rivoluzione*, 55.
35. Costa quoted by Nettlau in *Errico Malatesta*, 156.
36. Cafiero to Pezzi, 20 Nov. 1880, in *Rivoluzione per la rivoluzione*, 57.
37. Cafiero to the Florentine Internationalists, 6 Dec. 1880, *ibid.*, 59, 60.
38. Cafiero, “L’Azione,” *Le Révolté*, 25 Dec. 1880, *ibid.*, 62.
39. *Ibid.*, 63.
40. Gian Carlo Maffei, *Dossier Cafiero* (Bergamo: Biblioteca “Max Nettlau,” 1972), introduction.
41. Cafiero, “Rivoluzione,” in *Rivoluzione per la rivoluzione*, 67, 85.
42. *Ibid.*, 90, 91.
43. Maffei, *Dossier Cafiero*, 32.
44. *Ibid.*, 41, 45.
45. *Ibid.*, 56, 57.
46. Cafiero, “Ai compagni delle Romagne,” *Il Grido del Popolo*, 21 July 1881, in *Rivoluzione per la rivoluzione*, 95.
47. Masini, *Cafiero*, 314.
48. *Ibid.*, ch. 20.
49. Michels singles out Kuliscioff as “the real founder of Marxism” in Italy. Her natural brilliance and firm grasp of Marxist ideology made a profound impression on the Italian left in the 1870s. Michels comments at length about her “stupendous” looks in *Storia del Marxismo in Italia*, 77.

50. Bacchelli, *Il diavolo al Pontelungo* (Milan: Mondadori, 1965), 27.
51. *Ibid.*, 244.
52. Masini, *Cafiero*, ch. 22 and 357.

3. Antonio Labriola: The Philosopher of Praxis

1. Labriola to Engels, 3 Aug. 1892, in Giuseppe Del Bo, ed., *La corrispondenza di Marx e Engels con italiani* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1964), 443.
2. Luigi Dal Pane, *Antonio Labriola: La vita e il pensiero* (Rome: Edizioni Roma, 1935), 5. Francesco Saverio Labriola to Silvio Spaventa, 27 Dec. 1863, in “Documenti: Lettere di Antonio e di Francesco Saverio Labriola a Silvio Spaventa,” ed. Pier Carlo Masini, *Rivista Storica del Socialismo*, July–Sept. 1958.
3. Bruno Widmer, “La giovinezza di Antonio Labriola,” *Rivista Storica del Socialismo*, no. 11, 1960.
4. See Luciano Aguzzi, “Hegelismo di sinistra e socialismo in Italia,” in Lucia Romaniello, ed., *Le radici del socialismo italiano: Atti del Convegno, Milan 15–17 Nov. 1994* (Milan: Edizioni Comune di Milano, 1997).
5. Labriola to Engels, Apr. 1890, in Antonio Labriola, *Lettere a Engels* (Rome: Edizioni Rinascita, 1949), 2. Labriola to Engels, 14 Mar. 1894, *ibid.*, 142.
6. In “La giovinezza di Antonio Labriola,” Widmer cites the poor evaluations Labriola received from the school inspectors. Labriola often complained in letters to Spaventa about his unhappiness teaching high school.
7. Labriola, “Le ‘Lettere Napoletane’ di Antonio Labriola,” *Cronache Meridionali*, July–Aug. 1954, letter 5, 7 July 1872, 569; letter 9, 20 July 1872, 580. Labriola to Silvio Spaventa, Sept. 1872, in “Documenti,” ed Masini.
8. Labriola to Bertrando Spaventa, late June or early July 1875, in Giuseppe Berti, ed., “123 lettere inedite di Antonio Labriola a Bertrando Spaventa,” *Rinascita*, supplement to no. 1 of 1954, 71.
9. Labriola’s pedagogical writings are collected in *Scritti di pedagogia e di politica scolastica* (Rome: Ed. Riuniti, 1961). Labriola to Spaventa, July or Aug. 1875, in “123 lettere,” 73.
10. Dal Pane, *Antonio Labriola*, 139.
11. Benedetto Croce, “Come nacque e come morì il marxismo teorico in Italia (1895–1900),” in *Saggi filosofici*, vol. 4: *Materialismo storico ed economia marxistica* (Bari: Laterza, 1946), 277. See also Croce’s “Memorie della mia vita” in Labriola, *Lettere a Benedetto Croce 1885–1904* (Naples: Istituto Italiano per gli Studi Storici, 1975), 396.
12. Croce, “Antonio Labriola: Ricordi,” *Il Marzocco*, 14 Feb. 1904, in

- Labriola, *Scritti vari: Editi e inediti di filosofia politica*, ed. Benedetto Croce (Bari: Laterza, 1906), 499.
13. On Carducci see Richard Drake, *Byzantium for Rome: The Politics of Nostalgia in Umbertian Italy, 1878–1900* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980), ch. 1.
 14. Croce, “Antonio Labriola: Ricordi,” 501.
 15. Labriola to Engels, Apr. 1890, in *Lettere a Engels*.
 16. Dal Pane, *Antonio Labriola*, 165.
 17. Labriola to Engels, 21 Feb. 1891, in *Lettere a Engels*, 6.
 18. Labriola, “Del socialismo,” in *Scritti vari*, 298, 302, 300.
 19. Labriola, “Proletariato e radicali,” an 1890 pamphlet in Labriola, in *Scritti politici 1886–1904*, ed. Valentino Gerratana (Bari: Laterza, 1970), 220, 223.
 20. Labriola to Engels, 21 Feb. 1891, in *Lettere a Engels*, 9; 30 Mar. 1891, *ibid.*, 14; 3 Aug. 1892, *ibid.*, 66.
 21. Labriola to Engels, 18 Aug. 1892, *ibid.*, 67–68; 2 Sept. 1892, *ibid.*, 71.
 22. Malon’s major synthetic work, unfinished at the time of his death, was *Integral Socialism*; he published two volumes of this work in 1890 and 1891. Turati, “Benedetto Malon,” *Critica Sociale*, 16 Sept. 1893.
 23. Labriola to Turati, 31 Oct. 1890, in Alessandro Schiavi, ed., *Filippo Turati attraverso le lettere di corrispondenti, 1880–1925* (Bari: Laterza e Figli, 1947), 75; 18 Jan. 1891, *ibid.*, 79.
 24. Labriola to Turati, 17 Aug. 1891, *ibid.*, 88; 24 July 1892, *ibid.*, 91.
 25. Labriola to Engels, 21 May 1892, in *Lettere a Engels*, 59; 3 Aug. 1892, *ibid.*, 65.
 26. Labriola to Engels, 2 Sept. 1892, *ibid.*, 70.
 27. Labriola to Engels, 1 July 1893, *ibid.*, 111; 5 Nov. 1894, *ibid.*, 172.
 28. Labriola to Engels, 28 Oct. 1892, *ibid.*, 85, 86; 8 Nov. 1892, *ibid.*, 90.
 29. Labriola to Engels, 1 July 1893, *ibid.*, 110; 17 Nov. 1894, *ibid.*, 127.
 30. Labriola to Engels, 21 May 1892, *ibid.*, 59; 30 Mar. 1891, *ibid.*, 14.
 31. David Blackbourn and Geoff Eley, *The Peculiarities of German History: Bourgeois Society and Politics in Nineteenth-Century Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 3. Labriola to Engels, 29 Dec. 1892, in *Lettere a Engels*, 92; 2 Sept. 1892, *ibid.*, 69; 22 Aug. 1893, *ibid.*, 118.
 32. Labriola to Engels, 13 June 1894, *ibid.*, 147; 27 June 1895, *ibid.*
 33. Engels quoted in no author, “Nel cinquantésimo anniversario della morte di Antonio Labriola,” *Rinascita*, no. 2, Feb. 1954. Engels did, however, note “a few errors of fact.”
 34. Labriola, *Saggi intorno alla concezione materialistica della storia*, 1, “In Memoria del Manifesto dei Comunisti” (Roma: Ermanno Loescher, 1895), 17.
 35. *Ibid.*, 49.

36. Ibid., 89.
37. Ibid., 70, 68.
38. Ibid., 71.
39. Labriola, *Del materialismo storico: Dilucidazione preliminare* (Rome: Loescher, 1896), 15, 16–17.
40. Ibid., 22, 24, 25. At the end of the essay Labriola returned to the theme of the superstructure's relationship with the substructure. See esp. sections 10–12.
41. Ibid., 87.
42. Ibid., 92.
43. Ibid., 99, 148.
44. A fourth essay, "Da un secolo all'altro," was published posthumously in 1925. Dal Pane put this piece together from unpublished fragments on the theme of historical materialism. Croce published the raw notes for this essay as "Da un secolo all'altro: Considerazioni retrospective e presagi (frammento)," in Labriola, *Scritti varii*. It appears in English translation in Labriola, *Socialism and Philosophy* (St. Louis: Telos Press, 1980), 199–223.
45. Labriola, "Discorrendo di socialismo e di filosofia," in *Saggi sul materialismo storico*, ed. Valentino Gerratana and Augusto Guerra (Rome: Riuniti, 1964), 270.
46. "Without your prodding, I would not have done anything," Labriola wrote to Croce on 30 Sept. 1897, in *Lettere a Benedetto Croce*, 220. Labriola praised him for his "most diligent" corrections.
47. Croce, *Saggi filosofici*, vol. 4, preface, viii.
48. A French publishing house brought out the first two essays of the *Saggi* in *Essais sur la conception matérialiste de l'histoire* (Paris: Giardet Brière, 1897), with a preface by Sorel.
49. Croce, "Come nacque e come morì il marxismo teorico in Italia (1895–1900)," *Saggi filosofici*, vol. 4, 293, 304. Labriola to Croce, 3 Mar. 1898, in *Lettere a Benedetto Croce*, 267.
50. Labriola to Croce, 9 Oct. 1898, in *Lettere a Benedetto Croce*, 302. Labriola criticized Croce more systematically in "Postscriptum all'edizione francese di 'Discorrendo di socialismo e di filosofia,'" in *Saggi sul materialismo storico*, appendix.
51. Eduard Bernstein, *Evolutionary Socialism: A Criticism and Affirmation* (New York: Huebsch, 1912), 202.
52. Labriola to Croce, 19 Mar. 1899, in *Lettere a Benedetto Croce*, 326. Labriola, *Saggi sul materialismo storico*, 270.
53. Labriola to Kautsky, 5 Apr. 1899, *Annali* of the Istituto Giangiacomo Feltrinelli (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1960).

54. Labriola to Kautsky, 4 May 1899, *ibid.*
55. Turati, “La nostra tattica,” *Critica Sociale*, 1 Feb. 1894. Engels, “La futura rivoluzione italiana e il partito socialista” and “L’evoluzione della rivoluzione,” *Critica Sociale*, 1 May 1895. See also Engels to Turati, 28 June 1895, in *Filippo Turati attraverso le lettere*, 109.
56. See Kautsky, “Rivoluzione e anarchismo,” *Critica Sociale*, 16 Feb. 1894.
57. Labriola, “A proposito del libro di Bernstein,” *Mouvement Socialiste*, 1 May 1899, in Labriola, *Democrazia e socialismo in Italia*, ed. Luciano Cafagna (Milan: Universale Economia, 1954), 85, 87, 88.
58. Jean Jaurès, “Bernstein e l’evoluzione socialista,” pt. 4, *Critica Sociale*, 1 Aug. 1900.
59. Labriola to Kautsky, 21 Apr. 1899, *Annali*; 26 Sept. 1903, *ibid.*
60. Labriola to Kautsky, 18 Dec. 1902, *ibid.*; 12 Sept. 1903, *ibid.*
61. Labriola to Kautsky, 28 Sept. 1903, *ibid.*
62. Labriola, *Essays in the Materialistic Conception of History* (Chicago: Kerr, 1904). Labriola to Kautsky, no date, *Annali*; Labriola to Luise Kautsky, *ibid.*
63. Turati, “Antonio Labriola,” *Critica Sociale*, 16 Feb. 1904.
64. Turati, “In difesa dell’onore dei briganti,” *Critica Sociale*, 30 Nov. 1891.
65. J. A. Hobson, *Imperialism: A Study* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1965), 48.
66. Labriola, “La triplice e la pace: Lettera a Teodoro Moneta,” *La Tribuna*, 21 June 1901, in *Scritti vari*, 428.
67. “Tripoli, il socialismo e l’espansione coloniale,” *Giornale d’Italia*, 13 Apr. 1902, *ibid.*, 433.
68. *Ibid.*
69. No author, “Un marxista bellicoso,” *Il Regno*, 7 Feb. 1904. On origins of Enrico Corradini’s Nationalist movement, see Richard Drake, “The Theory and Practice of Italian Nationalism, 1900–1906,” *Journal of Modern History*, 53, no. 2, June 1981.

4. Arturo Labriola: The Revolutionary Betrayed

1. Arturo Labriola, *Spiegazioni a me stesso: Noti personali e culturali* (Naples: Centro Studi Sociali Problemi Dopoguerra, 1945), 17.
2. *Ibid.*, 18.
3. On Labriola’s early left-wing Mazzinianism, see Dora Marucco, “L’ambiente politico napoletano nell’esperienza giovanile di Arturo Labriola,” in *Miscellanea Walter Maturi* (Turin: G. Giappichelli, 1966)
4. Labriola, *Spiegazioni*, 34.
5. *Ibid.*, 47–48.

6. Labriola, "Nord e Sud: Crispini ed Anticrispini," *Critica Sociale*, 1 Sept. 1895.
7. Labriola, *Spiegazioni*, 36, 66.
8. Antonio Labriola to Croce, Sept. 1896, in Labriola, *Lettere a Benedetto Croce 1885–1904* (Naples: Istituto Italiano per gli Studi Storici, 1975), 151. In another letter to Croce he mentioned Arturo's physical shortcomings as well: "This young man of twenty is a pitiful specimen [and] does not come to half a man's height"; 29 Sept. 1894, *ibid.*, 56.
9. Vilfredo Pareto, "La risposta di Diogene: Sulle cause e sui rimedi degli scandali odierni," *Critica Sociale*, 1 Apr. 1893.
10. For Pareto's influence on the Nationalists, see Richard Drake, "The Theory and Practice of Italian Nationalism, 1900–1906," *Journal of Modern History*, 53, no. 2, June 1981.
11. Labriola, *Spiegazioni*, 84.
12. *Ibid.*
13. Sorel made a similar argument in "La crisi del socialismo scientifico," *Critica Sociale*, 1 May 1898.
14. *From Georges Sorel: Essays in Socialism and Philosophy*, ed. John L. Stanley (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), 78, 79.
15. *Ibid.*, 80, 85. In "Ethics of Socialism," a lecture at the Collège Libre des Sciences Sociales on 20 Feb. 1898, Sorel declared that the appearance of "the ethical spirit" characterized the highest stage of revolution. *Ibid.*, 101. He minimized the importance of violence and stressed instead respect for human dignity, the protection of the oppressed, and the sentiment of ethical progress as the moral bases of socialism.
16. *Ibid.*, 90, 91, 92.
17. See Enzo Santarelli, "Sorel e il socialismo italiano," *Rivista Storica del Socialismo*, no. 10, May–Aug. 1960.
18. Roberto Michels, *Storia del marxismo in Italia: Compendio critico con annessa bibliografia* (Rome: Libreria editrice "Luigi Mongini," 1910), 117.
19. Labriola, *Spiegazioni*, 12. Dora Marucco, in *Arturo Labriola e il sindacalismo rivoluzionario in Italia* (Turin: Einaudi, 1970), argues that important theoretical differences existed between Sorel and Labriola, particularly over Bergsonism. She sees Sorelianism as a point of departure for Labriola, not a destination.
20. Labriola, *Spiegazioni*, 111. Labriola, *Storia di dieci anni: 1899–1909* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1975), 43.
21. Labriola, *Spiegazioni*, 127.
22. Michels, *Storia critica del movimento socialista italiano dagli inizi fino al 1911* (Florence: La Voce, 1926), 145.
23. *Ibid.*, 213.

24. Ibid., 218.
25. Ibid., 212.
26. [Turati], "I socialisti rivoluzionari alla prova," *Critica Sociale*, 1–16 Apr. 1903.
27. Turati, Speech to the Congress, in Partito Socialista Italiano, *Rendiconto del VIII Congresso Nazionale: Bologna 8–9–10–11 Aprile 1904* (Rome: Mongini, 1904), 105, 112.
28. Ibid., 113.
29. Ibid., 116.
30. Labriola, Speech to the Congress, *ibid.*, 136.
31. Ibid., 138.
32. Ibid., 143, 145.
33. Ibid., 146.
34. Michels, *Storia critica del movimento socialista italiano*, 272, 293.
35. Ibid., 329.
36. [Turati], "I due partiti," *Critica Sociale*, 16 Apr. 1904.
37. Georges Sorel, *Reflections on Violence* (Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1950), 68, 88.
38. Ibid., 99. Pareto, who strongly influenced Sorel, was making the same argument about the middle class. See Drake, "Theory and Practice of Italian Nationalism."
39. Sorel, *Reflections on Violence*, 120, 99, 113.
40. Ibid., 154, 152.
41. Ibid., 200.
42. Ibid., 252.
43. Labriola, *Riforme e rivoluzione sociale* (Lugano: Società editrice "Avanguardia," 1906), 2d ed., 138, 139. In *La "Comune" di Parigi: Raccolta di otto conferenze* (Naples: Società editrice Partenopea, 1906), Labriola expressly cited Sorel as the inspiration for his understanding of the Paris Commune. In these lectures on the Commune, Labriola praised Louis Blanqui as the model revolutionary and concluded that revolutionary syndicalism is the realization of the Blanquist-Marxist tradition.
44. Labriola, *Riforme e rivoluzione sociale*, 140.
45. Ibid., 144, 150.
46. Ibid., 167, 160.
47. Ibid., 216, 217.
48. Ibid., 220, 221, 248.
49. Labriola, Speech to the Congress, Partito Socialista Italiano, *Resoconto stenografico del IX congresso nazionale* (Rome: Luigi Mongini Editore, 1906), 101, 121.

50. Ibid., 123.
51. Turati, “L’estetismo catastrofico dei sindacalisti e l’equivoco integralista” (discorso tenuto il 9 ottobre 1906 al congresso di Roma), in Turati, *Le vie maestre del socialismo*, ed. Rodolfo Morandi; rev. ed., ed. Gaetano Arfé (Naples: Morano Editore, 1966), 92.
52. Ibid., 100, 99, 100.
53. Ibid., 100.
54. See David D. Roberts, *The Syndicalist Tradition and Italian Fascism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1979), 16.
55. Turati, “Il socialismo come coscienza del movimento operaio e la sua azione concreta” (discorso tenuto il 22 settembre 1908 al congresso di Firenze), in Turati, *Le vie maestre del socialismo*, 128.
56. Ibid., 128–129.
57. Labriola, *Spiegazioni*, 131.
58. Marucco, *Arturo Labriola*, 192.
59. On Labriola’s economic theories, see Zeev Sternhell with Mario Sznajder and Maia Asheri, *The Birth of Fascist Ideology: From Cultural Rebellion to Political Revolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 101.
60. Labriola, *Spiegazioni*, 66, 252.
61. Labriola, *Storia di dieci anni*, 173, 186.
62. The journalist Indro Montanelli interviewed Labriola in 1959. To Montanelli’s questions about Marx, Sorel, the revolutionary syndicalists, and the current prospects of the Italian left, Labriola professed complete indifference. “My boy,” he said, “I am interested only in death.” Montanelli, *Gli incontri* (Milan: Rizzoli, 1961), 1073.

5. Benito Mussolini: The Indispensable Revolutionary

1. Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia: An Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge* (San Diego: Harcourt, Brace, 1936), 118.
2. Renzo De Felice, *Intervista sul fascismo*, ed. Michael A. Ledeen (Rome: Laterza, 1976); De Felice, *Rosso e nero*, ed. Pasquale Chessa (Milan: Baldini e Castoldi, 1995).
3. Jacob Burckhardt, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy* (London: Penguin, 1990), 53. Bakunin to Nabruzzi, 3 Jan. 1872, cited by Max Nettlau in *Bakunin e l'internazionale in Italia: Dal 1864 al 1872* (Geneva: Edizione del Risveglio, 1928), 296.
4. Pierre Milza, *Mussolini* (Rome: Carocci, 2000), 22. Milza honors De Felice by joining in the criticism of Mussolini’s “Marxist and philo-

Marxist biographers” (204). Such one-sided scholars, he complains, do not understand the difference between history and ideological moralizing.

5. Renzo De Felice, *Mussolini il rivoluzionario, 1883–1920* (Turin: Einaudi, 1965), 41.
6. For Marx, see Benito Mussolini, “Karl Marx (nel venticinquesimo anniversario della sua morte),” *La Lima*, 14 Mar. 1908, in Edoardo and Duilio Susmel, eds., *Opera omnia di Benito Mussolini* (Florence: La Fenice, 1951–1978), 44 vols., vol. 1, 101; for Labriola, see “Una nuova mania,” *La Lima*, 6 June 1908, *ibid.*
7. Mussolini, “Per finire,” *ibid.*, 6 June 1908, 147.
8. Mussolini, “La filosofia della forza” (postille alla conferenza dell’on. Treves), *Il Pensiero Romagnolo*, nos. 48–50, 29 Nov.–13 Dec. 1908, *ibid.*, 177.
9. De Felice, *Mussolini il rivoluzionario*, appendix 18, “Rapporto dell’ispettore generale di S. G. Gasti su Mussolini e i Fasci di Combattimento (giugno 1919),” 725–737.
10. See Walter Adamson, *Avant-Garde Florence: From Modernism to Fascism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993).
11. Mussolini, “La teoria sindacalista,” *Il Popolo*, 27 May 1909, in *Opera omnia*, vol. 2, 124.
12. Mussolini, “Lo sciopero generale e la violenza,” *Il Popolo*, 25 June 1909, *ibid.*, 163.
13. Mussolini, “Il socialismo degli avvocati,” *La Lotta di Classe*, 25 June 1910, *ibid.*, vol. 3.
14. Mussolini, “L’ultima capriola,” *La Lotta di Classe*, 26 Nov. 1910, *ibid.*; “Fine stagione,” *La Lotta di Classe*, 17 Dec. 1910, *ibid.*, 291, 292.
15. Mussolini, “Lo sciopero generale di protesta contro l’impresa di Tripoli,” *La Lotta di Classe*, 30 Sept. 1911, *ibid.*, vol. 4, 63.
16. Filippo Turati, “Anche soli! . . .,” *Critica Sociale*, 1 Oct. 1911; “Contro i due estremi, per l’azione socialista” (discorso tenuto il 17 ottobre 1911 al Congresso di Modena), in Turati, *Le vie maestre del socialismo*, ed. Rodolfo Mondolfi; rev. ed., ed. Gaetano Arfé (Naples: Morano Editore, 1966), 234.
17. Turati, *Le vie maestre del socialismo*, 235.
18. *Ibid.*, 231, 228, 231.
19. Mussolini, “Documenti per una nuova ‘Storia di dieci anni’,” *La Lotta di Classe*, 23 Mar. 1912, in *Opera omnia*, vol. 4, 119; “Le eresie che risorgono e le eresie che muoiono,” *La Lotta di Classe*, 29 June 1912, *ibid.*, 153, 155.

20. Mussolini, "Sull'azione del gruppo parlamentare," 8 July 1912, *ibid.*, 161, 170.
21. Turati, "Per l'anima socialista del riformismo," in *Le vie maestre del socialismo*, 253, 242.
22. Mussolini, "Da Guicciardini a . . . Sorel," *Avanti*, 18 July 1912, in *Opera omnia*, vol. 4, 174.
23. Mussolini, "I 'sinistri' alla riscossa," *La Folla*, 9 Feb. 1913, *ibid.*, vol. 5, 90. Milza, *Mussolini*, 164.
24. Mussolini, "Prefazione a 'Il socialismo rivoluzionario,'" in *Opera omnia*, vol. 5, 175 (Mussolini translated this 1912 book by Charles Albert and Jean Duchêne, and he wrote the preface for it in 1913); "Intermezzo polemico: Dalla magia . . . alla nevrosi," *Avanti*, 1 July 1913, *ibid.*
25. Mussolini, "Al largo!" *Utopia*, no. 1, 22 Nov. 1913, *ibid.*, vol. 6, 5–6.
26. Mussolini, "L'impresa disperata," *Utopia*, 15 Jan. 1914, *ibid.*, 49, 48.
27. Mussolini, "Un 'Blocco Rosso?'" *Utopia*, 15–28 Feb. 1914, *ibid.*, 84.
28. Mussolini, "La settimana rossa," *Utopia*, 15–31 July 1914, *ibid.*, 256, 257, 264.
29. Mussolini, "Battute di Preludio," *Avanti*, 21 July 1914, *ibid.*, 273, 271; "Lotta politica e lotta di classe," *Avanti*, 23 July 1914, *ibid.*, 279.
30. Mussolini, "Commento al delitto di Serajevo," *Avanti*, 29 June 1914, *ibid.*, 240; "Abbasso la guerra!" *Avanti*, 26 July 1914, *ibid.*, 288.
31. Mussolini, "Contro la guerra," *Avanti*, 22 Sept. 1914, *ibid.*, 368.
32. Mussolini, "Dalla neutralità assoluta alla neutralità attiva ed operante," *Avanti*, 18 Oct. 1914, *ibid.*, 399, 402.
33. No author, "Le dimissioni da direttore dell'*Avanti*!" (riassunto dei discorsi e delle dichiarazioni fatte a Bologna durante il convegno della direzione del Partito Socialista Italiano, nelle riunioni del 19–20 ottobre 1914), *ibid.*, 405.
34. Mussolini, "[Per l'espulsione dal partito]," Discorso, 24 Nov. 1914, in *Opera omnia*, vol. 7, 40–41; "Commento," *Il Popolo d'Italia*, 25 Nov. 1914, *ibid.*, 43.
35. De Felice concludes: "The conversion of Mussolini to interventionism was not determined by economic motives, but by a political crisis." *Mussolini il rivoluzionario*, 287. Milza concurs: "From the affair [the founding of *Il Popolo d'Italia*] Mussolini did not personally obtain any pecuniary advantage"; *Mussolini*, 198.
36. Mussolini, "Il partito del 'ni,'" *Il Popolo d'Italia*, 7 Feb. 1915, *Opera omnia*, vol. 7, 181.
37. Mussolini, ["Guerra liberatrice, guerra di libertà, guerra di civiltà"], Discorso, 11 May 1915, *ibid.*, 374.
38. Mussolini, "La caduta della Bastiglia," *Il Popolo d'Italia*, 14 July 1915, *Op-*

- era omnia*, vol. 8, 76; “Marx e . . . Hindenburg,” *Il Popolo d’Italia*, 28 Aug. 1915, *ibid.*, 185.
39. Erich Maria Remarque, *All Quiet on the Western Front* (Greenwich, Conn.: Fawcett, 1958 ed.), 160. Ernst Jünger, *The Storm of Steel: From the Diary of a German Storm Troop Officer* (New York: Howard Fertig, 1996), xii.
40. See Robert Wohl, *The Generation of 1914* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1979). He analyzes the Italian experience in ch. 5.
41. Mussolini, “Bandiere rosse,” *Il Popolo d’Italia*, 5 July 1917, *Opera omnia*, vol. 9, 27.
42. Mussolini, “Da Stürmer a Lénine,” *Il Popolo d’Italia*, 25 July 1917, *ibid.*, 74.
43. Mussolini, “Impudenza e mistificazione,” *Il Popolo d’Italia*, 13 Aug. 1917, *ibid.*, 109; “La libertà di sabotare,” *Il Popolo d’Italia*, 28 Sept. 1917, *ibid.*, 221; “Decidersi,” *Il Popolo d’Italia*, 17 Oct. 1917, *ibid.*, 268; “Espressione di fierezza,” *Il Popolo d’Italia*, 19 Oct. 1917, *ibid.*, 275.
44. De Felice, *Mussolini il rivoluzionario*, 362.
45. Mussolini, “Fronte al nemico!” *Il Popolo d’Italia*, 28 Oct. 1917, *Opera omnia*, vol. 9, 304; “Unità di anime,” *Il Popolo d’Italia*, 29 Oct. 1917, *ibid.*, 307.
46. Mussolini, [“Morti sì, ma schiavi no, schiavi mai!”], Discorso, *Il Popolo d’Italia*, 21 Nov. 1917, *ibid.*, 68.
47. Mussolini, [“Produrre per vincere”], Discorso, *Il Popolo d’Italia*, 1 Dec. 1917, *ibid.*, 98.
48. Mussolini, “Trincerocrazia,” *Il Popolo d’Italia*, 15 Dec. 1917, *ibid.*, 141.
49. Mussolini, “Divagazione,” *Il Popolo d’Italia*, 11 Aug. 1918, *ibid.*, vol. 11, 271.
50. For example, Zeev Sternhell states that “the Fascist ideology developed in an organic and logical manner and determined Mussolini’s political actions”; Sternhell with Mario Sznajder and Maia Asheri, *The Birth of Fascist Ideology: From Cultural Rebellion to Political Revolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 221. Expressly contradicting Sternhell, Milza observes that early fascism should not be interpreted as “the result of a project that is the fruit of a mature reflection and the outcome of a perfectly logical evolution”; *Mussolini*, 259.
51. Mussolini, “Divagazione.”
52. Mussolini, “Il discorso di Wilson,” *Il Popolo d’Italia*, 1 Oct. 1918, *ibid.*, 384; “La decisione,” *Il Popolo d’Italia*, 15 Apr. 1919, *Opera omnia*, vol. 13, 57.
53. Mussolini, “Atto di nascita del Fascismo” (discorso pronunciato a Milano, nella sede dell’alleanza Industriale e Commerciale sita in pi-

azza San Sepolcro 9, la mattina del 23 marzo 1919), *Il Popolo d'Italia*, 24 Mar. 1919, *ibid.*, vol. 12, 321, 322.

54. *Ibid.*, 322.

55. *Ibid.*, 325, 326.

56. Milza, *Mussolini*, 279.

57. De Felice, *Mussolini il rivoluzionario*, 544.

58. *Ibid.*, 279, 88–89.

6. Amadeo Bordiga: The Revolutionary as Anti-Realpolitiker

1. Franco Livorsi, *Amadeo Bordiga: Il pensiero e l'azione politica, 1912–1970* (Rome: Riuniti, 1976), 13.
2. Amadeo Bordiga, “Il socialismo meridionale e le quistioni morali,” *Avanti*, 1 Nov. 1912, in Bordiga, *Scritti 1911–1926*, vol. 1, ed. Luigi Gerosa (Genoa: Graphos, 1996), 121.
3. Bordiga, “Per la cultura socialista,” *L'Avanguardia*, 13 July 1913, *ibid.*, 283.
4. Bordiga, “Il socialismo a Napoli e nel Mezzogiorno,” *Utopia*, 15–28 Feb. 1914, *ibid.*, 361.
5. Andreina De Clementi, *Amadeo Bordiga* (Turin: Einaudi, 1971), 18. Bordiga, “Ai socialisti d'Italia: Il ‘Carlo Marx’ per il socialismo meridionale e contro la degenerazione dell'Unione Socialista Napoletana,” *Scritti 1911–1926*, vol. 1, 375. This pamphlet was published in April 1914.
6. Bordiga, “L'idealismo socialista,” *L'Avanguardia*, 11 Aug. 1912, *ibid.*, 83; “La gioventù socialista e le organizzazioni economiche,” *L'Avanguardia*, 15 Sept. 1912, *ibid.*, 93.
7. De Clementi writes that between the two men “a current of lively, reciprocal sympathy” existed. *Amadeo Bordiga*, 28.
8. Bordiga, “Dal principio al metodo,” *Avanti*, 3 Feb. 1913, *ibid.*, 192; “Per la cultura socialista,” *L'Avanguardia*, 13 July 1913, *ibid.*, 284; “Ai socialisti d'Italia,” *ibid.*, 399; “I deputati socialisti e il blocco,” *Il Socialista*, 2 July 1914, *ibid.*, 439.
9. Bordiga, “Preparazione culturale o preparazione rivoluzionaria?” *L'Avanguardia*, 20 Oct. 1912, *ibid.*, 107; “Discussioni interne: Il ‘punto di vista,’” *L'Avanguardia*, 15 Dec. 1912, *ibid.*, 147; “Il problema della cultura,” *Avanti*, 5 Apr. 1913, *ibid.*, 247.
10. Bordiga, “Per la concezione teorica del socialismo,” *L'Avanguardia*, 13 Apr. 1913, *ibid.*, 232.
11. *Ibid.*, 239.

12. Ibid., 241.
13. Bordiga, "La tattica del partito nelle elezioni amministrative," discorso alla V seduta (28 aprile 1914) del XIV congresso nazionale del PSI, Ancona, 26–29 aprile 1914, *ibid.*, 411, 412, 413.
14. Ibid., 418.
15. Bordiga, "Democrazia e socialismo," *Il Socialista*, 16 July 1914, *ibid.*, 458, 459.
16. Bordiga, "Ora grave," *Il Socialista*, 30 July 1914, in Bordiga, *Scritti 1911–1926*, vol. 2, ed. Luigi Gerosa (Genoa: Graphos, 1998), 15; "Il proletariato e la guerra," *Il Socialista*, 6 Aug. 1914, *ibid.*, 19.
17. Bordiga, "Democrazia guerrafondaia," *Il Socialista*, 20 Aug. 1914, *ibid.*, 45; "La parola ai fatti," *Il Socialista*, 31 Dec. 1914, *ibid.*, 186; "La bestialità sessuale nella guerra," *Il Socialista*, 1 May 1915, *ibid.*, 233.
18. Bordiga, "Eccitamenti," *Il Socialista*, 17 Sept. 1914, *ibid.*, 61.
19. Bordiga, "L'Avanti! e la guerra," *Il Socialista*, 17 Sept. 1914, *ibid.*, 65.
20. Bordiga [su una lettera di Benito Mussolini], *Il Socialista*, 1 Oct. 1914, *ibid.*, 76; "Per l'antimilitarismo attivo ed operante," *Il Socialista*, 22 Oct. 1914, *ibid.*, 86.
21. Bordiga, "Mussolini se ne va!" *Il Socialista*, 22 Oct. 1914, *ibid.*, 89; "Il quotidiano di Mussolini," *Il Socialista*, 12 Nov. 1914, *ibid.*, 129; "Boicottiamolo!" *Il Socialista*, 19 Nov. 1914, *ibid.*, 136.
22. Bordiga, "Socialismo e difesa nazionale," *Avanti*, 21 Dec. 1914, *ibid.*, 174, 176.
23. Bordiga, "Il socialismo di ieri dinanzi alla guerra di oggi," *L'Avanguardia*, 25 Oct., 1 Nov., and 16 Nov. 1914, *ibid.*, 115.
24. Bordiga, "Fermi al nostro posto," *Il Socialista*, 22 May 1915, *ibid.*, 247.
25. Bordiga, "Adler," *L'Avanguardia*, 5 Nov. 1916, *ibid.*, 290, 291; "Il partito socialista e l'ora presente," *ibid.*, 300.
26. Bordiga, "Nulla da rettificare," *Avanti*, 23 May 1917, *ibid.*, 302.
27. Bordiga, "La rivoluzione russa nell'interpretazione socialista," *L'Avanguardia*, 21 Oct., 4 Nov., 11 Nov., and 12 Dec. 1917, *ibid.*, 343–344, 351, 355.
28. Bordiga, "Gli insegnamenti della nuova storia," *Lo Stato Operaio*, 27 Mar. and 3 Apr. 1918, *ibid.*, 412, 421.
29. Ibid., 422, 425.
30. Bordiga, "Le direttive della rivoluzione russa in una fase decisiva," *Avanti*, 24 May 1918, *ibid.*, 428; "Le direttive marxiste della nuova Internazionale," *L'Avanguardia*, 26 May 1918, *ibid.*, 436, 439.
31. Paolo Spriano, *Storia del partito comunista italiano*, vol. 1 (Turin: Einaudi, 1967), 11.

32. Bordiga, Discorso, 5 Oct. 1919, in *Resoconto stenografico del XVI Congresso Nazionale del Partito Socialista Italiano* (Rome: Edizione della Direzione del Partito Socialista Italiano, 1920), 68, 62, 64.
33. Bordiga, Discorso, 7 Oct. 1919, *ibid.*, 257, 258.
34. Bordiga, Discorso, 5 Oct. 1919, *ibid.*, 70.
35. Spriano, *Storia del partito comunista italiano*, vol. 1, 78.
36. *Ibid.*, 110, 111.
37. Umberto Terracini, Discorso, 17 Jan. 1921, *XVII Congresso Nazionale del Partito Socialista Italiano: Livorno, 15–20 gennaio 1921* (Milan: Edizioni Avanti!, 1962), 165, 167, 171.
38. Bordiga, Discorso, 19 Jan. 1921, *ibid.*, 273, 274.
39. *Ibid.*, 296.
40. Giacinto Menotti Serrati, Discorso, 19 Jan. 1921, *ibid.*, 296, 300.
41. Turati, Discorso, 19 Jan. 1921, *ibid.*, 319, 320, 321.
42. *Ibid.*, 324.
43. *Ibid.*, 332, 334.
44. “Statuto del Partito Comunista d’Italia,” *ibid.*, 454; Article 7, 456; Article 8, 456.
45. Spriano, *Storia del partito comunista italiano*, vol. 1, 119. “Statuto del Partito Comunista d’Italia,” Article 31, 459; Article 64, 463. The Central Committee consisted of fifteen members, the Executive Committee of five.
46. “Manifesto ai Lavoratori d’Italia,” *ibid.*, 465, 473.
47. *Ibid.*, 473–474, 476.
48. Ernst Nolte, *Three Faces of Fascism: Action Française, Italian Fascism, and National Socialism* (New York: New American Library, 1963), pt. 1. Spriano, *Storia del partito comunista italiano*, vol. 1, ch. 9.
49. Umberto Terracini, *Intervista sul comunismo difficile*, ed. Arturo Gismondi (Bari: Laterza, 1978), 39. Angelo Tasca, *Nascita e avvento del fascismo: L’Italia dal 1918 al 1922* (Florence: La Nuova Italia, 1950), xx.
50. Tasca, “I primi dieci anni del partito comunista italiano,” pt. 3, “Comunismo e fascismo,” *Il Mondo*, 1 Sept. 1953. Spriano, *Storia del partito comunista italiano*, vol. 1, 200. At the party’s March 1922 Rome congress, from which the “Rome Theses” regarding the further centralization of the party emerged, the main issue concerned relations between the Socialists and the Communists. Although the Bordiga and Gramsci factions split over a variety of tactical and ideological issues, they agreed—in opposition to representatives of the Third International—on vetoing a rapprochement with the Socialists.
51. Spriano, *Storia del partito comunista italiano*, vol. 1, 220.

52. Bordiga, *Lenin* (Rome: Partisan edizione, 1970), 15, 20.
53. *Ibid.*, 50.
54. Antonio Gramsci, "Capo," *L'Ordine Nuovo*, 3rd ser., no. 1, Mar. 1924, in Gramsci, *La costruzione del partito comunista 1923–1926* (Turin: Einaudi, 1971), 13, 15.

7. Antonio Gramsci: The Revolutionary as Centrist

1. Antonio Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, ed. Joseph A. Buttigieg, 2 vols. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992, 1996). John Cammett, *Bibliografia gramsciana* (Rome: Fondazione Istituto Gramsci, 1989), and a supplementary volume updated to 1993 (Rome: Fondazione Istituto Gramsci, 1995).
2. Giuseppe Fiori, *Vita di Antonio Gramsci* (Bari: Laterza, 1966), 15.
3. Piero Gobetti, *On Liberal Revolution* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 20.
4. Gramsci, "Neutralità attiva ed operante," *Il Grido del Popolo*, 31 Oct. 1914, in Giansiro Ferrata and Niccolò Gallo, eds., *2000 pagine di Gramsci*, vol. 1 (Milan: Il Saggiatore, 1964), 180.
5. Gramsci, "Note sulla rivoluzione russa," *Il Grido del Popolo*, 29 Apr. 1917, *ibid.*, 252; "I massimalisti russi," *Il Grido del Popolo*, 28 July 1917, *ibid.*, 254.
6. Alberto Monticone, "Il socialismo torinese ed i fatti dell'agosto 1917," *Rassegna storica del Risorgimento*, Jan.–Mar. 1958, 57.
7. Gramsci, "La rivoluzione contro il 'Capitale,'" *Il Grido del Popolo*, 5 Jan. 1918, in *2000 pagine di Gramsci*, vol. 1, 265.
8. Gramsci, "Il nostro Marx," *Il Grido del Popolo*, 4 May 1918, *ibid.*, 291.
9. Gramsci, "Per conoscere la rivoluzione russa," *Il Grido del Popolo*, 22 June 1918, in Gramsci, *Scritti giovanili: 1914–1918* (Turin: Einaudi, 1958), 265–266, 268.
10. *Ibid.*, 310.
11. Gramsci, "Vita politica internazionale," pt. 1, *L'Ordine Nuovo*, 1 May 1919, in *L'Ordine Nuovo 1919–1920*, ed. Valentino Gerratana and Antonio A. Santucci (Turin: Einaudi, 1987), 3.
12. *Ibid.*, pt. 1, 34; pt. 4, 67.
13. Unsigned, "La conquista dello Stato," *L'Ordine Nuovo*, 12 July 1919, *ibid.*, 130.
14. *Ibid.*, 316.
15. Unsigned, "Cronache dell' 'Ordine Nuovo,'" *L'Ordine Nuovo*, 6 Mar. 1920, *ibid.*, 436; "La settimana politica," *L'Ordine Nuovo*, 15 Nov. 1919, *ibid.*, 317.

16. Unsigned, "Il rivoluzionario qualificato," *L'Ordine Nuovo*, 20 Dec. 1919, *ibid.*, 363.
17. *Ibid.*, 364.
18. Unsigned, "La settimana politica [XVII]," *L'Ordine Nuovo*, 24–31 Jan. 1920, *ibid.*, 394.
19. Unsigned, "Lo stato italiano," *L'Ordine Nuovo*, 7 Feb. 1920, *ibid.*, 404, 407.
20. Unsigned, "L'unità proletaria," *L'Ordine Nuovo*, 28 Feb.–6 Mar. 1920, *ibid.*, 438; "La settimana politica XIX," *L'Ordine Nuovo*, 28 Feb.–6 Mar. 1920, *ibid.*, 446.
21. Unsigned, "Cronache dell' 'Ordine Nuovo' XXVII," 6 Mar. 1920, *ibid.*, 436. Gramsci, "Il programma dell' 'Ordine Nuovo'," *L'Ordine Nuovo*, 14 Aug. 1920, *ibid.*, 619.
22. Unsigned, "Traditori sociali: Le guardie bianche di Reggio Emilia," *L'Ordine Nuovo*, 28 Aug. 1920, *ibid.*, 638; "Cronache dell' 'Ordine Nuovo' [XXXVI]," *L'Ordine Nuovo*, 21 Aug. 1920, *ibid.*, 629; "La settimana politica," *L'Ordine Nuovo*, 21 Aug. 1920, *ibid.*, 632.
23. Unsigned, "L'occupazione," *L'Ordine Nuovo*, 2 Sept. 1920, *ibid.*, 648; "Domenica rossa," *L'Ordine Nuovo*, 5 Sept. 1920, *ibid.*, 672; "Capacità politica," *Avanti*, Piedmontese ed., 24 Sept. 1920, *ibid.*, 689. The *Ordine Nuovo* group published many articles in the Piedmontese edition of *Avanti*!
24. Unsigned, "Il partito comunista," *L'Ordine Nuovo*, 4 Sept. 1920, *ibid.*, 655, 656, 661.
25. Gramsci, "Russia e Internazionale," *L'Ordine Nuovo*, 9 Jan. 1921, in Gramsci, *Socialismo e fascismo: L'Ordine Nuovo 1921–1922* (Turin: Einaudi, 1974), 33.
26. Gramsci, "Muli bendati," *L'Ordine Nuovo*, 12 Jan. 1921, *ibid.*, 36–37.
27. Gramsci, "Reazione," *L'Ordine Nuovo*, 23 Apr. 1921, *ibid.*, 145; "Risultati," *L'Ordine Nuovo*, 17 May 1921, *ibid.*, 166.
28. Giacinto Menotti Serrati to Jacques Mesnil, 28 Apr. 1921, cited in Spriano, *Storia del partito comunista italiano: Da Bordiga a Gramsci* (Turin: Einaudi, 1967), 123.
29. Gramsci, "Hai visto il fez?" *L'Ordine Nuovo*, 4 Sept. 1921, *Socialismo e Fascismo*, 318; "Il 'Lenin' italiano," *L'Ordine Nuovo*, 24 Aug. 1921, *ibid.*, 296; "La tattica del fallimento," *L'Ordine Nuovo*, 22 Sept. 1921, *ibid.*, 347; "La disfatta," *L'Ordine Nuovo*, 5 Apr. 1921, *ibid.*, 128; "Un partito inerte," *L'Ordine Nuovo*, 25 Dec. 1921, *ibid.*, 433.
30. Gramsci, "Terrore e orrore," *L'Ordine Nuovo*, 25 Mar. 1921, *ibid.*, 119; "Socialisti e fascisti," *L'Ordine Nuovo*, 11 June 1921, *ibid.*, 187; "L'ora del proletariato," *L'Ordine Nuovo*, 6 Aug. 1921, *ibid.*, 266; "Le masse e i

- capi,” *L’Ordine Nuovo*, 30 Oct. 1921, *ibid.*, 384; “I controrivoluzionari all’opera,” *L’Ordine Nuovo*, 18 Mar. 1922, *ibid.*, 480; “Le masse e i capi,” 384.
31. Gramsci, “Politica fascista,” *L’Ordine Nuovo*, 25 May 1921, *ibid.*, 167–168; “Contro il terrore,” *L’Ordine Nuovo*, 19 Aug. 1921, *ibid.*, 288.
 32. Gramsci, “Il ‘delirium tremens’ dei Socialisti,” *L’Ordine Nuovo*, 20 Nov. 1921, *ibid.*, 399.
 33. Gramsci, “Il programma de l’Ordine Nuovo,” *L’Ordine Nuovo*, 1–15 Apr. 1924, in *2000 pagine di Gramsci*, vol. 1, 720, 721.
 34. *Ibid.* His ellipsis.
 35. Matteotti to Turati, 28 Mar. 1924, in Alessandro Schiavi, ed., *Filippo Turati attraverso le lettere di corrispondenti, 1880–1925* (Bari: Laterza e Figli, 1947), 272.
 36. Matteotti to Turati, n.d. (written shortly before his assassination on 10 June 1924), *ibid.*, 272, 274.
 37. Gramsci, “La crisi della piccola borghesia,” *L’Unità*, 2 July 1924, in Gramsci, *La costruzione del partito comunista 1923–1926* (Turin: Einaudi, 1971), 26, 28.
 38. Gramsci, “La crisi italiana” (relazione al Comitato Centrale del Partito, 13–14 Aug. 1924), *L’Ordine Nuovo*, 1 Sept. 1924, *ibid.*, 29, 31.
 39. *Ibid.*, 32, 33.
 40. *Ibid.*, 36, 37.
 41. *Ibid.*, 39.
 42. Spriano, *Storia del partito comunista italiano: Da Bordiga a Gramsci*, 365.
 43. Leon Trotsky, *Lessons of October* (New York: Pioneer Publishers, 1937), 100.
 44. *Ibid.*, 105–106, 82.
 45. Spriano, *Storia del partito comunista italiano: Da Bordiga a Gramsci*, 282.
 46. Gramsci, “Come non si deve scrivere la storia della rivoluzione bolscevica: A proposito del 1917 di Leo Trotzki,” *L’Unità*, 19 Nov. 1924, in *La costruzione del partito comunista*, 211.
 47. Spriano, *Storia del partito comunista italiano: Da Bordiga a Gramsci*, 424.
 48. Gramsci, “Il partito combatterà con energia ogni ritorno alle concezioni organizzative della socialdemocrazia,” *L’Unità*, 7 June 1925, in *La costruzione del partito comunista*, 216, 217.
 49. *Ibid.*, 217.
 50. Gramsci, “La lotta contro la frazione e la discussione nel partito,” *L’Unità*, 10 June 1925, *ibid.*, 220; “Liquidatori di sinistra,” *L’Unità*, 12 June 1925, *ibid.*, 223.
 51. Gramsci, “Il partito si rafforza combattendo le deviazioni antileniniste,” *L’Unità*, 5 July 1925, *ibid.*, 252, 254–255; “Punti sugli I,” *L’Unità*, 22 July

- 1925, *ibid.*, 265; “Critica sterile e negativa,” *L’Unità*, 30 Sept. 1925, *ibid.*, 294.
52. Spriano, *Storia del partito comunista italiano: Da Bordiga a Gramsci*, 489, 490.
53. Spriano, *Storia del partito comunista italiano*, vol. 2 (Turin: Einaudi, 1969), 20.
54. Spriano, *Storia del partito comunista italiano: Da Bordiga a Gramsci*, 513.
55. Fiori, *Vita di Antonio Gramsci*, 241.
56. Gramsci, “Alcuni temi della questione meridionale,” in *2000 pagine di Gramsci*, vol. 1, 811, 819.

8. Palmiro Togliatti: The Revolutionary as Cultural Impresario

1. Antonio Gramsci, “La lettera di Gramsci al Comitato Centrale del Partito Comunista Sovietico nel 1926,” in Giansiro Ferrata and Niccolò Gallo, eds., *2000 pagine di Gramsci* (Milan: Il Saggiatore, 1964), vol. 1, 820.
2. *Ibid.*, 825.
3. *Ibid.*, 826.
4. Gramsci strongly suspected that the Communist party had not done everything it could to secure his release from prison. See Gramsci to Tatiana Schucht, 5 Dec. 1932 and 11 May 1933, in Gramsci, *Lettere dal carcere* (Turin: Einaudi, 1947).
5. Giorgio Bocca, *Palmiro Togliatti* (Bari: Laterza, 1977), vol. 1, 9. While adding many new details to our knowledge of Togliatti, Aldo Agosti appears to have conceived his highly sympathetic biography as a defense against “the feverish succession of ‘revelations’ fished out of the not always clear waters of the former Soviet archives,”; Agosti, *Palmiro Togliatti* (Turin: UTET, 1996), xiv.
6. *Ibid.*, 16.
7. *Ibid.*, 25.
8. Paolo Spriano, *Storia del partito comunista italiano*, vol. 2 (Turin: Einaudi, 1969), 161.
9. Even the pro-communist Spriano identified “the most unfortunate formula of ‘social fascism’ as a complete disaster for the European left,” *ibid.*, 163.
10. Tasca, “I primi dieci anni del partito comunista,” six articles published in *Il Mondo*, 18 Aug.–22 Sept. 1953. Agosti, *Palmiro Togliatti*, 139. Spriano, *Storia del partito comunista italiano*, vol. 2, ch. 13.
11. See Ignazio Silone, *Uscita di sicurezza* (Florence: Vallecchi, 1965). The title piece of this book appeared in Richard Crossman, ed., *The God*

- That Failed* (New York: Harper, 1949). His case has become the subject of a controversial exposé by Dario Biocca, “Ignazio Silone e la polizia politica: Storia di un informatore,” *Nuova Storia Contemporanea*, May–June 1998. Other articles on the subject followed in 1998 and 1999 by Biocca and by Mauro Canali. The two men collaborated on a book, *L’informatore: Silone, i comunisti e la polizia* (Milan: Luni, 2000), which received some scalding reviews by Silone’s defenders.
12. Renzo De Felice, *Mussolini il duce: Gli anni del consenso* (Turin: Einaudi, 1974). Togliatti, “Lezioni sul fascismo,” *Critica Marxista*, 7, nos. 4–5, July–Oct. 1969. Bocca, *Palmiro Togliatti*, vol. 1, 242.
 13. Spriano, *Storia del partito comunista italiano*, vol. 2, 399.
 14. Agosti, *Palmiro Togliatti*, 174.
 15. Spriano, *Storia del partito comunista italiano*, vol. 3 (Turin: Einaudi, 1970), 64.
 16. Togliatti later sought to defend himself against the charge of criminal culpability in the purge trials, declaring that if he had opposed them Stalin would have killed him: “History will judge if it was better to die or to live in order to save the party.” Cited by an approving Agosti (“things probably were just like that”), *Palmiro Togliatti*, 221.
 17. Bocca, *Palmiro Togliatti*, vol. 1, 301.
 18. Spriano, *Storia del partito comunista italiano*, vol. 4 (Turin: Einaudi, 1973), 13, 14.
 19. *Ibid.*, 261.
 20. *Ibid.*, 171.
 21. Agosti, *Palmiro Togliatti*, 312. In 1947 party membership stood at 2,100,000; *ibid.*, 327.
 22. *Ibid.*, 319.
 23. No author, “Programma,” *La Rinascita*, June 1944.
 24. Togliatti, “Antonio Gramsci,” *ibid.*, Apr. 1947. Felice Platone, “La politica comunista e i problemi della cultura,” *ibid.*, July 1947.
 25. Gramsci to Tatiana Schucht, 19 Mar. 1927 and 3 Aug. 1931, in *Lettere dal carcere*, 35, 159.
 26. Bocca, *Palmiro Togliatti*, vol. 2, 433. Paul Piccone analyzes Platone’s pruning of Gramsci’s prison writings and concludes that “the operation was not untypical of the Stalinist standard procedure”; Piccone, *Italian Marxism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 109. He further notes that this edition of Gramsci’s work “was immediately exposed for the fraud it was”; *ibid.*, 110. For a mainly exculpatory explanation of the Togliatti-Platone edition of Gramsci’s writings, see Agosti, *Palmiro Togliatti*, 332.
 27. Carlo Salinari, “Letteratura e vita nazionale nel pensiero di Antonio

- Gramsci," *La Rinascita*, Feb. 1951. For a severely negative evaluation of Gramsci's thought and influence, see Luciano Pellicani, *Gramsci, Togliatti e il Pci: Dal moderno principe al post comunismo* (Rome: Armando, 1990).
28. See esp. Gramsci, "La formazione degli intellettuali," *Quaderni del carcere*, vol. 3, *Gli intellettuali e l'organizzazione della cultura* (Turin: Einaudi, 1949). For the role of creative writers in this process, see vol. 6, *Letteratura e vita nazionale* (Turin: Einaudi, 1950).
 29. Gramsci, *Quaderni del carcere*, vol. 2, *Il materialismo storico e la filosofia di Benedetto Croce* (Turin: Einaudi, 1948), 22, 148. *Lettere dal carcere* was the first volume of this series.
 30. Leszek Kolakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), vol. 3, 220. Gramsci, *Quaderni del carcere*, vol. 2, 96, 131. For the cultural importance of genius, see the entry "Geni nazionali," in "Nozioni enciclopediche e argomenti di cultura," *Quaderni del carcere*, vol. 7, *Passato e presente* (Turin: Einaudi, 1951), 151.
 31. Gramsci, *Quaderni del carcere*, vol. 4, *Il Risorgimento* (Turin: Einaudi, 1949), 106.
 32. *Ibid.*, 238.
 33. *Ibid.*, 353.
 34. Gramsci, *Quaderni del carcere*, vol. 5, *Note sul Machiavelli, sulla politica, e sullo stato moderno* (Turin: Einaudi, 1949), 3, 5.
 35. Togliatti, untitled front-page editorial, *La Rinascita*, Dec. 1949.
 36. Bocca, *Palmiro Togliatti*, vol. 2, 436. Alan Bullock, *Hitler and Stalin: Parallel Lives* (New York: Vintage, 1993), 510. Commission of the Central Committee of the C.P.S.U. (B.), ed., *History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolsheviks)* (New York: International Publishers, 1939), 273–274.
 37. Togliatti, "L'umanità al bivio," *La Rinascita*, Nov. 1951.
 38. Emilio Sereni, "Andrea Zdanov: Modello di combattente per il trionfo del comunismo," *ibid.*, Sept.–Oct. 1948. Andrei Zdanov, *Politica e ideologia* (Rome: Edizioni Rinascita, 1949), preface, viii.
 39. Zdanov, "Per il socialismo contro l'imperialismo e la guerra," 6 Nov. 1946, in *Politica e ideologia*, 13.
 40. Roderigo di Castiglia (Togliatti), "Vittorini se n'è ghiuto, e soli ci ha lasciato! . . .," *La Rinascita*, Aug.–Sept. 1951.
 41. Ilya Erenburg, "Giornata della pace," *ibid.*, Aug.–Sept. 1949. Togliatti touted Erenburg's *America* in "Segnalazioni," *ibid.*, Jan. 1948.
 42. Luigi Longo, "Gloria a Stalin," *ibid.*, Feb. 1953. Togliatti cited by Agosti in *Palmiro Togliatti*, 402. Agosti characterizes Togliatti's attitude toward Stalin as one of "limitless, total admiration."

43. No author, "Democrazie popolari," *La Rinascita*, Feb. 1954.
44. Documents from the Soviet archives also make clear Togliatti's pivotal role in Stalin's postwar European strategy. In *Togliatti e Stalin: Il PCI e la politica estera staliniana negli archivi di Mosca* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1997), 149, Elena Aga-Rossi and Victor Zaslavsky declare that, like all Stalinists, the PCI leader aspired above all "to satisfy the interests of the Soviet Union." On Soviet funding for the PCI, see Gianni Cervetti, *L'oro di Mosca: La verità sui finanziamenti sovietici al PCI raccontata dal diretto protagonista*, 2d ed. (Milan: Baldini e Castoldi, 1999), and Valerio Riva, *Oro da Mosca: I finanziamenti sovietici al PCI dalla Rivoluzione d'Ottobre al crollo dell'URSS* (Milan: Mondadori, 1999).
45. See Kolakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism*, vol. 3.
46. Togliatti, "La via italiana verso il socialismo," *La Rinascita*, Feb. 1956.
47. Togliatti, "Le risposte di Palmiro Togliatti a nove domande sullo Stalinismo," *ibid.*, May–June 1956. This interview appeared simultaneously in *Nuovi Argomenti*.
48. *Ibid.* No author, "Problemi posti dai fatti di Poznan," *La Rinascita*, July 1956; "La situazione e i compiti del partito ungherese dei lavoratori," *ibid.*, Aug.–Sept. 1956.
49. Togliatti, "Sui fatti di Ungheria," *La Rinascita*, Oct. 1956. Vittorini cited by Nello Ajello in *Intellettuali e PCI: 1944–1958* (Rome: Bari-Laterza, 1979), 415.
50. Togliatti, "Dalle decisioni all'azione," *La Rinascita*, Dec. 1956. On the crisis of the communist left, see Ajello, *Intellettuali e PCI*, chs. 11–12.
51. See Richard Drake, *The Revolutionary Mystique and Terrorism in Contemporary Italy* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), ch. 3.
52. Raniero Panzieri, "Appunti di un viaggio in Cina," in Panzieri, *L'alternativa socialista: Scritti scelti 1944–1956*, ed. Stefano Merli (Turin: Einaudi, 1982), 162. Luciano Della Mea, "Una lettera su Raniero Panzieri (17 July 1969)," in Giampiero Mughini, ed., *Il revisionismo socialista: Antologia di testi 1955–1962* (Rome: Nuova Serie di Quaderni di Mondo Operaio, 1975), 234. Kolakowski dismisses Maoism as an ideology "in which Marxist phraseology is much in evidence but whose dominant values seem completely alien to Marx." In particular, the peasant origins of Maoism put it "as far as can be from Marx's doctrine and the tradition of European Marxism"; Kolakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism*, vol. 3, 495, 513–514.
53. Bocca, *Palmiro Togliatti*, vol. 2, 668. Garaudy cited by Agosti in *Palmiro Togliatti*, 465.
54. Togliatti, "Vittoria alla Fiat," *La Rinascita*, 14 July 1962. Spriano, "Dalla sfida di Valletta ai fatti di Piazza Statuto," *ibid.*

55. No author, *Ancora sulle divergenze tra il compagno Togliatti e noi: Alcuni importanti problemi del leninismo nel mondo contemporaneo* (Peking: Casa editrice in lingue estere, 1964), 5.
56. Ibid., 39, 54, 150.
57. Adriano Sofri, "Noi giovani di un altro mondo," *L'Unità*, 26 Mar. 1993.
58. Mino Fucillo, "Inseguendo la rivoluzione," *La Repubblica*, 29 July 1989.
59. Sofri was accused of masterminding the 1972 murder of Luigi Calabresi, a police officer. After twelve years and seven trials, the polemics in Italy over the case have yet to subside. Sofri is currently serving a sentence of twenty-two and one-half years for his role in the murder.
60. Togliatti, *Promemoria di Yalta* (Rome: Istituto Gramsci, 1964).

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1. See Donatella Della Porta, ed., *Terrorismi in Italia* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1984).
2. Mario Moretti, *Brigate rosse: Una storia italiana* (Milan: Anabasi, 1994), 34. See Giuseppe Vettori, *La sinistra extraparlamentare in Italia: Storia, documenti, analisi politici* (Rome: Newton Compton, 1973); Patrizia Violi, *I giornali dell'estrema sinistra: I tranelli e le ambiguità della lingua e dell'ideologia* (Milan: Garzanti, 1977); Nanni Balestrini and Primo Moroni, *L'orda d'oro 1968–1977: La grande ondata rivoluzionaria e creativa, politica ed esistenziale*, 2d ed. (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1997).
3. Patrizio Peci, *Io l'infame*, ed. Giordano Bruno Guerri (Milan: Mondadori, 1983), 15, 41. On Negri, see Richard Drake, *The Revolutionary Mystique and Terrorism in Contemporary Italy* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), ch. 5. One of Negri's most-cited books was *Il dominio e il sabotaggio: Sul metodo marxista della trasformazione sociale* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1978).
4. Enrico Fenzi, *Armi e bagagli: Un diario dalle Brigate Rosse* (Genoa: Costa and Nolan, 1987), 76.
5. Alberto Franceschini, with Pier Vittorio Buffa and Franco Giustolisi, *Mara, Renato e io: Storia dei fondatori delle BR* (Milan: Mondadori, 1988), 204.
6. Piero Bertolazzi, Renato Curcio, Maurizio Ianelli, and Mario Moretti, "Occorre una soluzione politica per tutti," *Il Manifesto*, 5–6 Apr. 1987.
7. Walter Tobagi, *Storia del movimento studentesco e dei marxisti-leninisti in Italia* (Milan: Sugar, 1970). See Angelo Ventura, "Il problema storico di terrorismo italiano," *Rivista Storica Italiana*, 92, no. 1, Mar. 1980, 125–151; and Ventura, "La responsabilità degli intellettuali e le radici culturali del terrorismo di sinistra," in Carlo Ceolin, ed., *Università, cultura, terrorismo* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 1984).

8. Brigate Rosse, “Risoluzione della Direzione Strategica, Feb. 1978,” cited in “Il testo del volantino di rivendicazione,” in Piero V. Scorti, *Il delitto paga? L'affare Tobagi* (Milan: Sugar, 1985), pt. 4.
9. See Richard Drake, *The Aldo Moro Murder Case* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995).
10. Brigate Rosse, “Risoluzione della Direzione Strategica, Feb. 1978,” *Controinformazione*, nos. 11–12, July 1978. For more on the Red Brigades, see Drake, *Revolutionary Mystique and Terrorism*.
11. François Furet, *The Passing of an Illusion: The Idea of Communism in the Twentieth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 146. An enormous archivally based literature on the Soviet Union is now available. See esp. Stéphane Courtois et al., *The Black Book of Communism: Crimes, Terror, Repression* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999). The Stalin biographies of Edvard Radzinsky (New York: Doubleday, 1996) and Dimitri Volkogonov (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1988) are annihilating, as is Robert Conquest’s 1990 update of his classic 1968 book, *The Great Terror* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990). Robert Service tries to find some good to say about Lenin (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000), but Volkogonov sees him as a demonic figure (New York: HarperCollins, 1994), an image strongly reinforced by Richard Pipes in *The Unknown Lenin: From the Secret Archive* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996).
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13. “Documento di Rivendicazione Iniziativa Br,” <www.caserta24ore.it>, Mar. 2002.

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